

AUSTRALIA'S WILDERNESS ADVENTURE MAGAZINE

Wild

MORE THAN 30 YEARS OF WILDERNESS ADVENTURE HERITAGE

ISSUE

142

SOLO IN SCANDINAVIA
GRAMPIANS TRACK NOTES
SNOWY MOUNTAIN SEARCHERS
ICE CLIMBING FOR BEGINNERS
SKIING VICTORIA'S SIDECOUNTRY
BOULDER DASH ON MT EMMETT
AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHY
FIVE-DAY WALK MENU

Peace on the high plateau

Kayaking in Antarctica
Canberra Centenary Trail
The life of a ski patroller
Insulated jackets reviewed
Spotlight on the Kakadu plum
Walking with wallabies

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Wild

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WARNING



The activities covered in this magazine are dangerous. Undertaking them without proper training, experience, skill, regard to safety and equipment could result in serious injury or death.

Cover Lemmenjoki
National Park, Finnish
Lapland. Jef Maion /
maion.com

Contents Sunset over
Moogerah Dam, QLD.
Phil Rettke /
philrettkephotography.com

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Gear heaven and great Aussie talent

Amazing this could come out of little ol' Australia, I heard someone say at the recent Outdoor Retailer Australia show in Sydney. We were talking about some new gear—and I mean properly new, unveiled here before anywhere else in the world, not trickling Down Under a year or so after it has been in and out of fashion in the US—and as excited as I was about the homegrown innovation, I also felt guilty that we should be so surprised. Walking out on to the floor of the annual tradeshow, which has received a palpable energy boost since relocating from its regular venue in Canberra, I was dumbstruck by the volume of products representing world-leading outdoor research either carried out in our own backyard or championed by risk-taking Aussie distributors with an eye for what works in the harshest of environments. To my left there were sleeping bags with game-changing 'grid-lock' baffles (designed in Canberra), impressive inflatable-crossover-pole tents (Sydney) and pioneering ultralight sleeping mats with 'air-sprung' cells (Perth). To my right there were fully waterproof jackets made of entirely recyclable materials (Gold Coast), super-stable gadget-equipped kayaks (also Gold Coast) and ethical new textile combinations in socks (Melbourne). Not that I'm about starting gear rumours, and the full trend report will appear in the next issue, but I think it's important to remember that local gear designers have always innovated and continue to do so to ensure we (and especially those making their first tentative steps into the outdoors) are having the best possible time. In the era of warehouse-style retail, it's easy to get distracted by the 'xx% off' signs or jargon-y labels and miss the small print about fabric quality or testing grounds. Not all experiments in the gear world will be revolutionary, but knowing the processes

are in place to bring the most robust and technical products to our shores, and that our expert retailers have already filtered the good from the useless, might make you pause before ordering another jacket online from overseas or question quality promises next time you see a copycat pack launched at \$500 and then discounted to \$300 the following week.

Print media has its challenges, but one of Wild's principle concerns is safeguarding the role of expert manufacturers and retailers of adventure gear in Australia: without them we would be but a reflection of North American or European lifestyles. Sea to Summit's Tim Macartney-Snape reminded me at the show: "This entity known as the 'Australian outdoor industry' developed out of individuals deciding they could make a living out of providing outdoor gear, so while there will always be outdoor gear here, it's not a given that the innovation and quality will be." I agree that we as consumers should demand more than stale ideas and shopper manipulation, and I came away from the show with a renewed enthusiasm for analysing and celebrating high-value outdoor gear. Incidentally, Tim will be making a series of presentations around the country in October to celebrate 30 years since his trailblazing 1984 expedition on Everest (in which Wild played a tiny part), and I urge you to go along. Not only will funds raised go to a community project in Nepal, but you will undoubtedly hear how Australians have and always will continue to push boundaries. In this smorgasbord of an issue, I hope we capture an ounce of that creativity and determination.

Carlie Trotter
Editor

Wild

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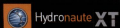


Image: John Mader

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Issue 141, May-Jun 2014



LETTER OF THE ISSUE

Gifford wins a set of MSR SureLock TR-2 poles ideal for walking, snowshoeing and ski touring, valued at \$220 including powder and trekking baskets.

RELIVING GOOD TIMES ON CRADLE MOUNTAIN

Thanks for a continuing excellent magazine, which I have had from the start and still enjoy. The Cradle centenary article (p10, Wild issue 141) brought back many memories, some of which may be of interest. My first visit to Tasmania was in 1953 as a Senior Scout (now Venturers) participating in the Rendezvous South West (RVSW) expedition to Corinna on the Pieman River. Following RVSW, some of us stayed to visit Cradle Mountain and Lake St Clair, going up to Pine Valley Hut (where we were snowed in) but not walking the complete Overland Track. Despite the weather, my appetite for the Reserve—as it was then commonly known—was whetted. When I started at Melbourne University in 1954 I joined a mountaineering club trip through the reserve in December. Three of us in the party attempted to climb all the main mountains in the reserve. We started with a traverse of the whole length of Cradle Mountain, which I have only done once since. It was interesting to read that the traverse is still rarely done. Further along the track we had a couple of very long days of climbing, one making a circuit of Doris, Ossa, Thetis, Paddys Nut, Achilles and round to Pelion West before heading down. Then from Pine Valley, the two more experienced climbers—Max and Bryan—established first climbs on Geryon. Due to time constraints we missed out on climbing Mount Ida on the east side of Lake St Clair. My love of park ensured that all Ventures in my unit had the opportunity to walk the Overland Track. Hence, for a long period I walked the track every two or three years. My children also walked the track at ages 11 and 13. My latest walk up Cradle Mountain was

in 2008, though my wife has visited Tasmania tracing family history more recently. Her father was from Tullah and used to walk from there to the Waldheim area in the 1930s.

Gifford Hatfield
Via email

HUT HEATING CONT'D

Sorry Zac, in reference to your letter in issue 141, the coal-fired stove is gone from Windy Ridge (Bert Nichols Hut). Instead, a small gas-fired heater tries valiantly to heat the cavernous communal area. This does absolutely zilch to heat the sleeping quarters. The only coal-fired heater we encountered on the Overland Track over Easter was at Narcissus Hut. There are also coal heaters at Scott Kilvert and Pine Valley huts.

Colin Farley
Via email

EXPOSING THE CREPE BANDAGE MYTH

Many thanks for a great magazine, including the '9 wilderness survival myths' article in issue 140. It is good to see someone dispelling the myth that drinking your own urine is a survival tactic. I have another suggestion: a crepe bandage is just about useless in a bushwalker's first aid kit. Crepe bandages have been shown to be ineffective in snake bite first aid and they do not have sufficient strength to provide any support for a sprained ankle. I am a snake handler, bushwalker and former St John Ambulance remote area first-aid instructor and have not carried a crepe bandage in my kit for years. I used to be a member of Bushwalkers Wilderness Rescue Squad and when teaching I explained that crepe bandages are for keeping a dressing in place, while elastic bandages provide support and compression. As such, an elastic bandage is far better for both snake bite and sprained joints. I carry a special lymphatic compression bandage when handling snakes and have a good quality elastic bandage in my first-aid kit for bushwalking. A couple of years ago I put together a document detailing the best ways to bandage different parts of the body and the importance of pressure and immobilisation to keep venom within the lymphatic system (and out of venous system) until help arrives. Fellow Wild readers who are interested can download this at bungendorepodiatry.com.au. A 1994 study proved that even a perfect crepe bandage applied by a paramedic does not provide sufficient compression to close down the lymphatic system.

Allan Donnelly
Bungendore, NSW

Reader's letters & tips are welcome and could win you a fabulous piece of outdoor kit! Write to Wild, 11-15 Buckhurst St, South Melbourne, VIC 3026 or email wild@primecreative.com.au

FRIENDS & FOLLOWERS

f Grant Innis: To all you adventurers out there, self-proclaimed or otherwise, keep doing what you're doing and sharing it!

f Base Camp Adventure Fitness: "I trained way too much for that mountain," said no one ever.

f Dunkeld Adventure: Remember the golden rule: moisture + movement = blister. If you control these two factors, blistering is impossible!

t @Nicko_McGuire: @wildmag just read issue 141 cover to cover. Great stuff, keep it up!

t @TourismAus: NSW national parks to follow Tasmania and NZ in growing bushwalking tourism infrastructure

t @ORGear: Searching for more clarity in your life? Try hiking 2,200 miles...

BUSHWALKING TIP



Often one sees used toilet paper in the bush and—I hate to say it—I'm sure it's mostly from women after having a pee. You can carry out your paper in an old film canister; just go and ask at your local camera store for one. When you get home simply tip it into the toilet and rinse out the canister. Alternatively, I open muesli bar wrappers very carefully from the top to use as paper receptacles.



Lani Imhof
Nowra,
NSW

Lani wins an Imhof prize pack of waterproof gadget protectors valued at \$105,

including the eSeries 13 for a large smartphone or point-and-shoot camera and the eSeries 20 for a 10-inch tablet.

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Leading a stray

Mark Daffey from Victoria writes: This photo was taken on a Canon EOS 5DII using a 20mm lens while exploring the Cappadocian valleys around Göreme in Turkey. A local dog adopted my friend (pictured) and I for the day, following us everywhere. A few days later we saw the same dog in a different area with another group of hikers.

Photographer's checklist: Travel planning

- Camera, tripod, memory cards, lenses, charged batteries, filters, cleaning cloth. Have you got everything you need? Make a list, and check it twice. (You may never get another chance to take that shot and discovering you're missing your memory card after hours of driving or flying is soul-shattering.)
- Spend some time researching the location. Check the park website to see how far you have to walk, check the local weather forecast, check sun and moonrise times using a smartphone app like Night Sky. Look up pro photographers who spend a lot of time at the location, as they know the best spots and time of day to capture images. A good challenge

is to try and put your own signature on a popular photograph of an iconic location.

- Get up early, so that by the time you are returning to your tent or hotel room having captured the most amazing sunrise over a much-photographed natural monument, the crowds are just starting to make their way out.
- Don't rush or rely on post-production skills. Relax and take your time making sure the camera is set up with just the right exposure and composition etcetera.



Award-winning landscape photographer Cameron Blake runs weekend workshops and six-day tours on the Overland Track. His next Cradle Mountain workshop is October 4-6. Overlandphototours.com.au



Mark wins a LowePro Dryzone 40L roll-top backpack valued at \$269. The durable pack with breathable EVA backpad boasts an IPX-6 splashproof rating, removable padded camera case and lash points for attaching your trekking poles or tripod.

For your chance to win a quality piece of outdoor kit, send your humorous, inspiring or spectacular shots to wild@primecreative.com.au.

To be considered for the Sept/Oct *Wild Shot*, send in submit your best photo by August 1.

Walkers brave tough conditions for charity challenge



Photo: Anna Warr

Over 500 people took part in the seventh WildEndurance Team Challenge in the Blue Mountains in May, raising more than \$260,000 for the Wilderness Society in the process, writes competitor Dan Slater.

The demanding 100-kilometre hike between Dunphrys Camp and Katoomba is now one of three regular events in greater Sydney attracting hardened bushwalkers and adventure racers. The competition is divided into 50- and 100-kilometre categories for teams of between two and seven people, who have to stay within 100 metres of each other throughout.

The morning of the event brought misty, drizzly weather, but spirits were high as entrants ranging in age from 19 to 68 gathered at the start line.

The crowd, which was split evenly between the sexes, included a mixture of corporate groups, bushwalking veterans, enthusiastic young guns

and trail runners. This diversity was played out in the range of equipment on display: from sturdy boots, long waterproofs and large packs to short shorts, ultralight jackets and trail running shoes.

After some last-minute words of advice, WildEndurance coordinator Sarah Williams counted the crowd down and the race began, somewhat cruelly, with a steep hill. Though the rain slowed and eventually fizzled out, the temperature hovered around 6°C.

A considerable percentage of the distance was on fire trail—the Bluey's default surface—and therefore stable, while punishing crosswinds offset the spectacular views on the Narrow Neck Plateau.

A lengthy, knee-jarring descent down the Kedumba Valley Road was followed by an equally unrelenting eight-kilometre climb, which competitors agreed was the hardest section of the course. The more pleasant singletrack sections included Mount Debert up to Tarros Ladder, which was substituted with a protected aluminium ladder for the event, and the sections of the Federal Pass around the base of the escarpment.

Though only half of the 160 starting teams finished with all members, the event was free of any serious injuries. With the temperature dropping to 2°C overnight, however, hypothermia did become a concern for organisers.

Jarrad Barnes, whose team Suits You Sir entered the 100-kilometre race, said afterwards: "It was definitely harder physically than when I last did it in 2010, when we had 30°C days. I saw a six or seven hypothermic cases between 40 and 50 kilometres, compared with the same number of [general fatigue] casualties at the 60 to 70-kilometre mark last time."

My own two-man team, Squiddydee, set a new course record in the 50-kilometre category with a time of six hours 59 minutes, while the four-person Bioathletic team took out the 100-kilometre title in 18 hours 11 minutes. The last walkers home in each category clocked times of 16 hours 17 minutes and 33 hours 26 minutes respectively.

One of the heroes of the day was Bioathletic team member Dominic Monkton, who had been told he would never walk again after an accident eight years ago. He said: "I am interested in the inequities on this planet and doing my bit for a sustainable future; I can think of nothing better than to run 100 kilometres through the World Heritage-listed Blue Mountains, raising funds to help protect our wild places."

The annual charity event has raised nearly \$1.8 million for wilderness protection campaigns since 2008.



wildendurance.gofundraise.com.au

National climbing festival revived

The Australian Climbing Festival is being revived this October after a seven-year hiatus, with a focus on wilderness adventure presentations and workshops as well as sport climbing competitions.

The event will take place in Katoomba over the weekend of October 17-19 and is expected to attract around 2,000 visitors. Organiser Gemma Woldendorp, a local rockclimbing guide, said: "Australian climbing has changed quite a bit since the last festival in 2007, including the opening of more gyms, so this year's event will cater for a real cross section of people interested in the sport, from boulderers and slackliners to armchair mountaineers and adventure climbers."

The 2014 Oceania Boulder Championships, incorporating the Australian Boulder Nationals, will see local climbers pitted against competitors from New Zealand and New Caledonia during the festival. Centred around a climbing wall inside the Katoomba Sports & Aquatic Centre, the three-day event will also include skills clinics and gear

workshops, adventure film screenings and debates covering subjects ranging from environmental stewardship to "Is climbing sexy?". Speakers will include pioneer rockclimber Mike Law and mountaineers Damien Gildea and Chris Warner as well as photographer Simon Carter, Arapiles icon Louise Shepherd and adventurer Tim Cope. Australian outdoor legends Greg Mortimer and Dick Smith will also appear alongside Tim Macartney-Snape commemorating the 30th anniversary of the first Australian ascent of Everest (see Wild issue 15). Climbers visiting from overseas are set to include Cedar Wright, Andy Fitzpatrick and Hazel Findlay.

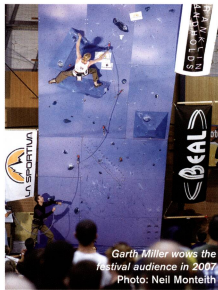
If successful, Woldendorp envisions the festival running alternate years just as Escalade did in the 1990s.

"The number of people offering to help gives me great confidence, as this is run entirely by volunteers," she said. The festival will also host the Australian premiere of *Resounding Silence*, a short film documenting Woldendorp and Natasha Sebire's

five-week expedition to climb and paraglide off virgin peaks in Greenland in 2012.



australianclimbing festival.com.au



Garth Miller wows the festival audience in 2007. Photo: Neil Monteith

Prepping for a top time on the Aussie 8

Three Brisbane men are aiming to break the record for the quickest consecutive ascent of the highest mountain in each Australian state and territory this August. Dale Cokley, Thomas Cramer and Henk Morgans, who met four years ago through climbing and call themselves Team Sum8, are aiming to improve upon the record of eight days and 14 hours set by another trio last April. They will not only be running the peaks in winter, but also without the aid of a support crew.

In June, after completing a 10-peak training weekend in the Victorian Alps, Morgans told *Wild*: "We originally just wanted to do this as a personal challenge, but when we found out others set a record last year we realised we wanted to pioneer our own way and do it in winter when the ridgelines will be even more beautiful."

"We come from different backgrounds—me from mountaineering and the others from endurance running—and I think that has helped us develop a good system out on the trail where we can advise and motivate each other at different points."

The trio started training in earnest in April and realise their choice of clothing could make or break the expedition, seeing as they will almost certainly be running in snow on mountains Kosciuszko, Bogong and Ossa.

Morgans added: "[On the training trip] we were on the limit for the littlest gear we could carry for the weather—at times we were in whiteout conditions with wind and snow stinging our faces—but we know that Gore-Tex shoes, lightweight waterproof gloves and thermal sleeves like the ones used by cyclists will be essential."

"The running included ankle-twisting hardpack snow as well as fresh powder so we are pondering whether to take snowshoes as well."

The team will be carrying two GPS watches as well as a compass and map.

They will start with Mount Meharry in Western Australia and finish on Mount Bartle Frere in Queensland, running the downhills and walking steeply to conserve energy.

During the training weekend, a two-hour flight delay followed by a campground closure illustrated how tight it will for the unassisted runners to keep to their transfer schedule between states. The camera they took to document their summits also stopped working in the sub-zero temperatures overnight.

"If I was alone I may have turned back, but failure is not even in our mindset," said Morgans.

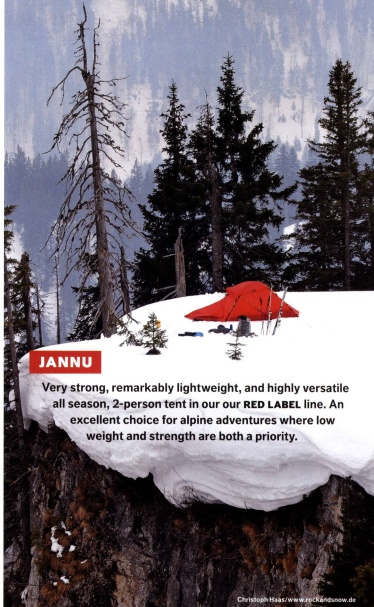


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L-R Henk Morgans, Dale Cokley and Tom Cramer



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Bacchus Marsh adventurer completes upstream epic



Photo: chrishayward.com.au

In May, 20-year-old Chris Hayward became the first person to complete a sea-to-source ascent of the Murray River system finishing at the summit of Mount Kosciuszko.

Over five and a half months, the Bacchus Marsh adventurer paddled around 2,220 kilometres from the river mouth near Hindmarsh Island to the Hume Dam before hiking 340 kilometres to its source and on to Australia's highest peak. During the solo journey, Hayward battled with extreme heat, low river levels and illness, while also taking the time to rescue numerous snakes,

birds and other critters on his way upstream.

The Sea to Source to Summit expedition arose from jokes made during Hayward's 2012 descent of the Murray, when he became the youngest person to achieve the feat despite never having kayaked before.

He told Wild: "This time, getting out of the kayak knowing I had set a new record was a sort of climax, but it didn't hit me what I'd achieved until I emerged on the road after two weeks in the bush without seeing another person.

"When I started out I'd get responses of 'you're bloody mad to paddle upstream', but I also met some incredibly supportive people along the river and had to put a stop to care packages because I'd end up taking on an extra nine kilograms at some places."

Following in the footsteps of 19th-century explorer Charles Sturt, Hayward is in awe of the beauty of the river's upper reaches as well as the section between Robinvale and Mildura.

He said the section above Yarrowonga was one of the most challenging this time because it involved dragging the 17-foot kayak over sandbars for hundreds of metres and relying more on speed than strength when paddling. Hayward also had to face an old nemesis in Lake Alexandrina. "At the start of my 2012 expedition I capsized in that lake and had to swim 500 metres back through the washing machine-like chop; this time it took me a week instead of two days to cross," he said.

"It's only eight kilometres of open water from Point Sturt but the chop was swamping my kayak and I knew swimming half the distance would feel like swimming to Tassie—it was ridiculously scary."

Starting the hike section of the journey was also a shock to the system. "After five months sitting on my butt that first 40 kilometres of walking, which involved climbing 400 metres straight off, was incredibly physically and mentally tough," he added.

The biggest test, however, was when mild mercury poisoning and bacterial gastroenteritis saw him hospitalised.

Hayward explained: "I'd had three days of paddling in 53-degree heat on the leg between Tooleybuc and Swan Hill, and started to experience dizziness, then tunnel vision and stomach cramps. I was drinking eight litres of water a day and still going to sleep with a dry mouth. When I finally hitchhiked into town and the doctor asked 'what can I do for you', I just broke down. When you've been alone so long and help arrives, it's overwhelming."

Hayward had been eating 200 grams of canned tuna a day and suspects he had not cleaned his Lifestraw filter thoroughly enough for the amount he was drinking. The doctor recommended he abandon the expedition, but after a week of rest he got back in his Wilderness Systems Tempest 170.

He added: "Others try to macho it up, be like a machine, but I want people to know I'm just an average Joe with average fitness who spent 18 months in an office prior to this, so there's nothing stopping you."

Rather than parents or older brothers, it was a Bob Cooper Outback Survival course in his early teens, then a trip to Tasmania, that fired Hayward's love of nature and solo outdoor challenges.

As a trained snake handler, he was naturally drawn to beaches where caravan park visitors could be seen "waving shovels and screaming" during the expedition.

He recalled: "One day I saw a family gathered by the water pointing at where they had seen a snake swim under a tree, so I got in the water to scare it out of its hiding spot, bagged it and took it to the local rescue centre. I'd got used to seeing the decapitated bodies of snakes on beaches. I later got a message from the father claiming his seven-year-old son had said 'when I grow up I want to be like that guy with the snake'—that has to be one of my best days."

Hayward also picked up corallies that had been rendered flightless after ingesting pesticides and dug out kangaroos and sheep that had become trapped in the mud, and has scars to prove it. One of his motivations for the expedition was to raise awareness of Melbourne-based environmental charity Greenfleet, which plants native trees as part of its campaign to reduce Australia's carbon emissions.

For his next adventures, Hayward is eyeing up a windsail/bike hybrid known as a Whike and considering the Bicentennial National Trail on horseback.

He said: "Learning a totally new skill takes me back to being a kid and adds to the sense of accomplishment."

Before that, he is writing a book of his experiences, planning to tour schools with a video of his latest expedition and launch a health food range.



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Gold Coast Kokoda Challenge, QLD, July 19-20 Joining Teams of four will trek 96 kilometres along creeks and fire trails in the Gold Coast hinterland for this popular event in support of the Kokoda Challenge Youth Program. kokodachallenge.com

Adventure Race Australia, QLD, July 27 The Queensland round of the new novice-friendly race series will see entrants run, bike, rogaine and either paddle, climb or abseil their way around the Sunshine Coast hinterland. adventureaustralia.com.au

Avon Descent, WA, Aug 2-3 Established in 1973, this unique 124-kilometre river race open to all manner of paddlercraft is open for entries until July 18. avondescent.com.au

Katherine Ultra Challenge, NT, Aug 3 Individual and team competitors swim, run, bike and kayak in and around the Katherine Gorge and river for this annual 100-kilometre challenge. kmcc.com.au

Lake Macquarie Rogaine, NSW, Aug 16 This annual six- and 12-hour rogaine typically takes in steep climbs, open forest and beautiful creeks. nswrogaining.org

The Big Burke & Willis Trek, SA, Aug 20 Around 300 people are expected to trek through the deserts of south-west Queensland and north-east South Australia for this 12-day charity challenge. burkeandwillstrek.com.au



SCROGGIN

Changing priorities in Nepal

An avalanche on Everest considered the deadliest single tragedy in modern mountaineering claimed the lives of 16 Sherpa guides in April. In May, the Nepalese government opened 104 other peaks to foreign climbers, including two named after Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay.

New high-flying Himalaya treks

World Expeditions has released its 2014-15 Himalaya brochure including three new itineraries in Kashmir and Ladakh, as well as a High Flyers' Trek on Everest that involves walking to 4,930 metres and returning by helicopter. An Australian-first guided trek in Bhutan's Ngang Tang Valley and a Hike and Raft Nepal tour also feature.

Scenic Rim makes the top eight

The new Scenic Rim Trail run by Spicers Retreats has become the eighth tour to join the Great Walks of Australia collective. The leisurely four-day walk, which includes luxurious tented accommodation, is open until November.

Focus on twitcher tourism

A newly signposted birdwatching trail including 13 sites along the Macquarie River in New South Wales is expected to attract both Australian and international visitors to the area in the hope of spotting grey-crowned babblers, painted honeyeaters and hooded robins, among others.

Packed schedule for Fed weekend

The Ben Cruachan, South Gippsland, West Gippsland and Strzelecki bushwalking clubs will together host this year's Federation Walks weekend (November 7-9). The program includes 22 walks ranging from easy to hard off-track in and around Baw Baw National Park, Wirilda State Park, Walhalla and Rawson.

Unique attempt at Tasman odyssey

Broadbeach man Stuart Cleary will try to become the first kayaker to circumnavigate the Tasman Sea solo and unsupported next year, covering a distance of around 15,000 kilometres. The Tasman is yet to be crossed one-way by a solo kayaker despite several

attempts, including the tragic disappearance of Andrew McAuley in 2007.

NSW parks get the Google treatment

The NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service is the first Australian organisation to use the Google Trekker backpack camera to record 360-degree imagery of areas inaccessible by car. Park rangers will wear the camera around some of the state's most popular walking routes with the aim of producing 16 interactive maps ahead of the International Union for Conservation of Nature World Parks Congress in November.

Big bucks laid down for Grampians trail

Grampians Tourism has released the plans for its proposed \$27.5 million Grampians Peaks Trail, in the hope of attracting a further 23,000 people to the national park each year. The 144-kilometre track will run from Mount Zero to Mount William and down to Dunkeld. It will feature 11 bushwalker campsites, including Bridges Bluff, Mount Rosea, Stockyard Saddle and Mount Abrupt.



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1 Amphibian Softshell \$150

This polyester/spandex jacket with microfleece lining and water-resistant zips may be designed for fishermen but it's flexible enough for romping up hills too. mayflytackle.com.au

2 ProGear 2350 LED \$44.95

Pelican's latest pocket-sized torch provides up to 100 lumens on a single AA battery, should last 15 hours on low lighting mode and survive being submerged in a metre of water for half an hour. pelicanprogear.com.au

3 Steady Tool \$120

This nifty multitool includes two foldable legs and a screw-in mount that turn it into a tripod for a camera weighing up to 350g, or a camera phone, in addition to the usual blades, screwdrivers, pliers and wirecutter. gerber.com

4 Sportz SUV Tent

Napier Outdoors has updated its largest touring tent for Australian distribution, adding a full-length fly. This polyester/taffeta dome sleeps up to eight people. napieraustalia.com.au

5 Raven Touring Skis \$1,399

After five years in development, 4Fmrt has unveiled this lightweight 102mm-waist ski designed to float in powder but also hold edge and turn tightly on hardpack. rideism.com.au

6 Thermotech Leggings \$49.95

The new range of polyester/elastane thermals from Vigilante feel suede-like on the skin, dry quickly and stretch as you move while retaining their shape. vigilante.com.au

7 Loke Jacket \$149.95

This pocket-sized, waterproof/breathable jacket features long underarm zips, zipped pockets and fully sealed seams, plus a drawcord hem and hood. hellyhansen.com.au

8 Equinox Z \$549

Cavers and campers might enjoy Bushnell's latest night-vision monocular, which offers a viewing distance of 300m with six-fold magnification as well as still and video recording capabilities inside a water-resistant housing. tasco.com.au

9 Exos 58L \$269.95

Osprey has lightened the weight of its Exos series packs while improving support through the harness and hipbelt. The lid and sleeping mat straps are detachable, and it comes with a built-in whistle. ospreypacks.com

10 Sherpa 100 Recharging Kit \$689

Utah-based Goal Zero's most popular kit to date has arrived in Australia complete with a 200-watt solar panel designed to charge a smartphone up to 20 times plus various USB, AC, 12V and laptop outputs. goalzero.com.au

11 MCB Compass SH \$59.99

Suunto's southern hemisphere floating compass, with fixed declination scale, has a mirror that locks open at 90, 120 and 180° and is accurate to 2.5°. suunto.com/en-au

12 H14.2 Light System \$139 SWAP

This 350g rechargeable headlamp from Led Lenser handily converts into a belt- or bike-mountable torch offering up to 350 lumens over 260m for 30 hours. zenimports.com.au



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13 Women's Matterhorn Jacket \$439.95

New for 2014, the Pure Brandz apparel range made from fully recyclable Sympatex fabric with a waterproof rating higher than 45,000mm includes this attractive two-ply shell with detachable hood. purebrandz.com

14 Agent GV \$259.95

The latest gender-specific, Gore-Tex-lined hiking shoe from Asolo boasts a Natural Shape fit, meaning it is wider at the toes, more rounded at the heel and offers greater arch support than previous models. intertrek.com.au

15 Men's Helix Hood \$349.95

Icebreaker's warmest jacket yet features a DWR-treated polyester shell and proprietary wool filling including merino outcuts and a corn-based plastic for a combination of cosiness when wet and machine washability. au.icebreaker.com

16 Java Mill \$54.95

Coffee snobs rejoice! GSI Outdoors has released a 270g, ceramic, conical burr grinder with nesting hand crank that will leave the delicate aroma of your beans intact. spelean.com.au

17 Cot One \$298

This 190cm x 67cm campbed made of the alloy used in DAC tent poles takes seconds to set up and can lift up to 150kg off the wet or rocky ground by 16cm, despite only weighing 1.9kg. helinox.com.au

18 Tactix Watch \$549

Garmin's commando-style watch stores 1,000 waypoints (like the Fenix), with the added advantage of a curved non-glare face and things like skydiving software. garmin.com.au

19 KettlePot \$109.95

BioLite's stainless steel pot with detachable kettle top and 'cool-touch' handle, plus lid and nesting bowl, allows you to quickly heat 1.5L of water and doubles as a carry case for the BioLite stove. seatosummitdistribution.com.au

20 Premium Pillow \$44.95

Aeros' regular-sized premium pillow comprises a 50D brushed polyester outer, a low-profile valve and curved internal baffles that help cradle your head. seatosummitdistribution.com.au

21 Loka Ultralight \$299.95

By scrapping a few accessory straps and updating the hipbelt on the original Loka, and trading 330D for 210D nylon, F-stop Gear has shaved over 50g off its popular 37L camera-compatible pack. frontierequipment.com.au

22 Nao Headlamp \$229

Petzl's rechargeable headlamp with sensor for auto-adjusting lighting has been upgraded from 355 lumens to a whopping 575 and now also lasts longer. spelean.com.au

23 Fable II Gloves \$149.99

The Gore-Tex-lined, goatskin leather and neoprene gloves favoured by aerial skier David Morris were updated with a flash of colour around the reinforced knuckles before his silver medal win in Sochi. xtm.com.au

24 Edit Helmet \$289

Giro's lightest (375g) full-featured snow helmet to date features an integrated GoPro mount that allows you to attach, or remove, your POV camera without a trace. rideism.com.au

Gubinge *Terminalia ferdinandiana*

The gubinge, or Kakadu plum (or Billygoat plum), occurs between the coastal vine thickets of the west Kimberley and the tropical woodlands of the Top End. This green, olive-sized fruit, which tastes tart with a sweet edge, has been recognised as having huge commercial potential due to its exceptional nutritional properties.

The gubinge tree grows slowly to around 10 metres tall and can produce around 50 kilograms of fruit in a good year. These trees with cream-coloured flowers can be spotted in most parks within 100 kilometres of the Northern Territory coast as well as King Leopold National Park in the Kimberley.

More than being considered the next macadamia in terms of export potential, a technique being trialled in the cultivation of gubinge, called savanna enrichment, could actually revolutionise agronomy in the dry tropics. This enrichment involves planting trees within the natural vegetation, effectively transforming regularly burnt savanna into productive woodlands and forests similar to those that once carpeted much of the country.

Long prized as a bush food and medicine by Aboriginal people, gubinge first caught the attention of the wider community in the 1980s via the ABC's *Bush Tucker Man* series, when analysts found it contained the highest levels of vitamin C of any fruit in the world (around 100 times that of an orange).

Subsequent research through the CSIRO started in 2008 under nutritional scientist Dr Izabela Konczak revealed that the fruit also boasts unprecedented antioxidant levels and can provide enormous health benefits. Using isolated human cells, Konczak and PhD candidate Aaron Tan saw that the 'antioxidant' extracted from the fruit reduced oxidative stress, which is thought to be involved in the development of a wide range of human diseases and disorders. It also increased the activity of the immune system and killed cancer cells grown in cultures.

Other research is underway to investigate the fruit's ability to treat Alzheimer's disease and as a natural food preservative. There is also a continuing demand for it as a gourmet bush food and ingredient in skincare products.

All the fruit that reaches market currently is wild harvested, largely by Aboriginal people from traditional lands. But gathering commercial quantities of the small fruit is tedious work and access to wild trees can be limited during the wet season — the main fruiting time. Harvests can also be severely affected by wildfires and cyclones, and there are ongoing concerns about the impacts of driving vehicles into environmentally sensitive areas where wild stands often occur.

The savanna enrichment trials have been established near Broome through training programs in horticulture and land management delivered by the Kimberley Training Institute in collaboration with Traditional Owners and a range of other organisations. The first trees planted seven years ago on the 20-hectare site known as Balu Buru, a Yawuru term meaning 'place of trees', have now started to produce fruit. The concept of planting trees within the existing vegetation where natural biodiversity is ultimately enhanced, rather than creating monocultures on cleared land, was proposed 10 years ago during a seminar at Charles Darwin University. The underlying aim was and is to support the development of an industry that maximises involvement with and benefits for indigenous people across the natural range of the plant, essentially from Broome to Arnhem Land.



This bush fruit being cultivated on the Balu Buru plantation near Broome is at the heart of a huge agricultural opportunity for the north of Australia. Photo: Kim Courtenay

Bidayadanga elder Merridoo Walbidi, who was part of one of the last family groups to emerge from traditional life in the Great Sandy Desert in the 1960s, says: "Growing gubinge helps keep people and culture strong, as well as making money for our community."

Rowan Foley, general manager of the Alice Springs-based Aboriginal Carbon Fund, also believes the production of gubinge and other high-value native fruits including Queensland's Burdekin plum will have broader economic, social, cultural and environmental benefits.

Kim Courtenay

Former journalist Kim Courtenay has spent 30 years working as a horticulturist in Broome and the Top End. He is also a lecturer at the Broome campus of the Kimberley Training Institute, working to promote opportunities for local Aboriginal communities.



Find out more about the gubinge enrichment project at kimberley.tafe.wa.edu.au

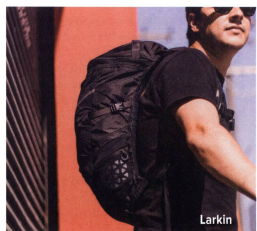
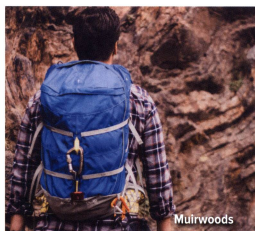
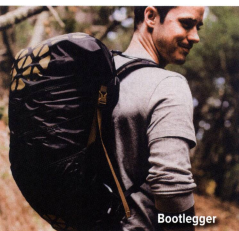
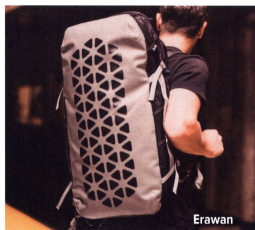
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The future is...motorised?

The trekking experience is changing rapidly in the Indian Himalaya, reports Central Australian Bushwalkers' Michael Giacometti



You have spent months planning and training. For a week you have trekked high and low to acclimatise to the altitude. Finally you lurch breathlessly up to the 5000-metre pass, the highpoint and highlight of your Himalayan trek. You lift your gaze from your boots to take in the expansive view, only to find a jeep-load of tourists out on a day trip taking selfies. Welcome to the future of trekking in the Indian Himalaya. Centuries of relative isolation have kept the culture and traditions of the people of Ladakh and Zaskar strong. Of course they have a right to the tools of progress, to their rewards and the unintended harms. Though I would not choose to walk along a trek section that is now a dusty road plied by four-wheel drives and trucks, what alternative is there?

All across the mountainous region bordering Pakistan and China, roads are continually cleared, improved, widened and sealed for safer and speedier travel, mainly for mining and the military. At great expense, new bridges capable of bearing greater tonnage are built over narrow streams and across wide rivers. Of most concern for trekkers, however, is the bulldozing and grading of new roads through precipitous gorges and over steep and high passes to, and through, formerly isolated villages. On the popular route over the Zaskar Range, between Padum in Zaskar and Lamayuru in Ladakh, there are new road impacts at both ends. From Padum, the main road stays on the

true right of the Zaskar River, passing through Stongde and Zangla villages, past the walk bridge to Pigma, and continues downstream into Zaskar Gorge beyond the confluence of the Zingchan River. This road will eventually, in five years, reach the Manali-to-Leh highway. A less-used road travels the true left of the Zaskar River downstream to Pishu village, two days' walk from Padum. Many trekking groups walk on this side of the river after crossing the bridge near Karsha, but you can also drive to Pigma Bridge a half-day walk from Pishu. It is an easy two-hour trek from this bridge to Hanumil, so it is possible in one day to continue beyond Hanumil and over the Parpi La to the Zingchan River campsite. On this entire section the road to nowhere (yet) down Zaskar Gorge is clearly evident on the opposite side of the river. Development from Lamayuru and Khalsi at the northern end of the trek continues apace. The road up to Honupatta is being widened for sealing and the road beyond Photogsar has been bulldozed over Sengge La, the highpoint and highlight of the trek at 4,960 metres, before terminating just over the 4,450-metre-high pass known as Kiupa La. There is a very steep descent from Kiupa La to a stream, and a steady climb and descent over two minor passes before reaching Lingshed village, less than a three-hour walk from the road end. Between Kiupa La and Honupatta, the walking trail and road diverge at times for significant

distances, but in other places walking on the road is unavoidable. The switchback scars of the road as it climbs and descends the passes are an eyesore. These scars in a landscape mostly devoid of vegetation are visible for many kilometres, and will rapidly increase the rate of erosion and the need for road maintenance. On the three-day trek from Lingshed to Honupatta last September I saw 10 vehicles on the road, one of them bearing a load of trekkers to Photogsar. The volume of traffic is not great, but it was at the end of the season and we saw only one other group trekking. The number of vehicles and trekkers they are carrying will inevitably increase as the road conditions improve. In effect, the classic 10-day Padum-Lamayuru trek has become a five-day Pigma-Photogsar trek. If pressed for time, or if you adamantly dislike roadwalking, you could end at Kiupa La after only three days. Groups looking for an alternative to the road over Sirsi La could try the exciting Yapola Gorge trail between Photogsar and the road to Phanjila. Elsewhere in the region, the road to Kanji is being widened and sealed, and the direct road through the Zaskar Gorge to Leh is due to be completed within five years. Remote high-altitude trekking is changing and the question is whether we will continue to walk the dusty road with a guide and horses among the trucks tooting their horns.



Bob Brown's green living

A sacred indigenous site in Queensland's central interior demands respect and contemplation, writes Bob Brown

Carnarvon Gorge is the centrepiece of one of Queensland's most spectacular national parks. As the park camping area was shut in May, we spend a single night at one of the privatised venues. The next day's walk up the gorge was one of photographic delights, including a classic scene of native palms and sandstone cliffs reflected in one of the pools of Carnarvon Creek.

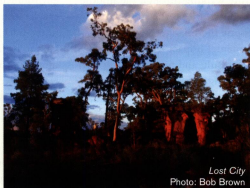
There were hundreds of people at the accommodation hubs but only a dozen, at most, walked the easy 10-kilometre track to the Big Bend in the gorge. There are short sidetracks to the Amphitheatre (a cylindrical canyon entered via a ladder and narrow slit), Wards Canyon (wherein grows the world's biggest fern), Aboriginal art galleries defaced here and there by Caucasian graffiti, and narrow side canyons.

Though we were able to camp just 10 kilometres away as the crow flies on the Moffatt Tops, this rugged country requires a 300-kilometre drive south from Emerald to the town of Injune and then back north along the Mitchell Highway to get to the gorge.

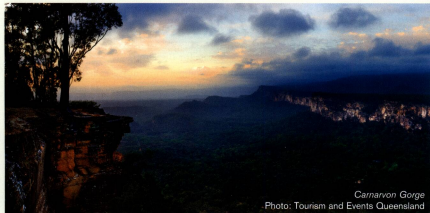
While most visitors miss the gorge's core walk, fewer still get too see wonders of this eroding sandstone plateau, such as its majestic Marlong Arch, a crassly named but noble pillar called Lots Wife (more graffiti) and Cathedral Rock (ditto). Fortunately, national park status seems to have stemmed the tide of vandalism.

Paul and I went north to visit Bush Heritage Australia's 65,000-hectare Carnarvon Station in the crescent of the 300,000-hectare national park. BHA is doing a great job restoring the expansive native grassland meadows and billabongs, and helping to protect more of the Bidjara people's sites from introduced weeds and animals.

By sheerest good luck, we were there at the right time to join a big throng on nearby Mount Tabor Station for the launch of Bidjara station manager Keelen Mailman's autobiography *The Power of Bones*. The event was held in one of the most spellbinding places in Australia, the so-called Lost City (pictured above). Here, the blood-red sandstone has eroded and become a Bidjara spiritual mecca. The Lost City boasts painted overhangs, red-coiffed chambers, soaring pillars, arches, grottos and fantastic outcrops. It is pervaded with an ancient human presence. It is a Bidjara, national and international treasure, and newly flagged for tourism. Let's hope the parking, accommodation and amenities are put some kilometres away and that, as in any European cathedral, the Bidjara people's reverence for the place remains supreme for the centuries to come.

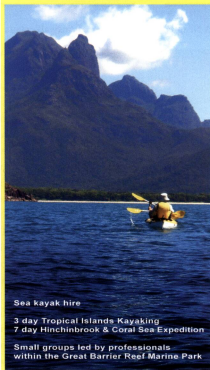


Lost City
Photo: Bob Brown



Carnarvon Gorge
Photo: Tourism and Events Queensland

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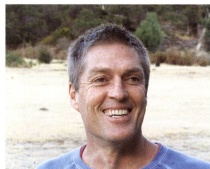
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EC INSIGHT

Brett Neagle, the new owner of Auswalk, chats with Wild about the role of ecotourism and his life on the trail



I was 26 when I first trekked in the Himalayas, on the Annapurna Circuit, and that experience of walking at 5,000 metres made me realise there were more lives than the one I'd come from on the South Australian coast. The experience had a real calming effect.

After living in Africa and Brazil for a few years I returned to Australia and started work as a tour guide. I spent my spare time walking through the middle of the country and in the mountains, and became increasingly aware of my environmental impact. I stopped eating meat as a result, and because it was part of my training to become a yoga teacher.

I also trained as a therapist. I enjoy finding out what other people get out of walking in nature. I have always been a rainforest lover—I love the weather, the smell, everything. I just got back from walking in Carnarvon Gorge and neither words nor video can capture the magic of that place.

When I joined Auswalk a couple of years ago, I immediately saw that both its guides and guests are highly educated in environmental responsibility. The most crucial instruction I give groups is to keep to the track, though Australian walkers tend to be far more careful than international visitors about that anyway. Now as owner, I'm doing my best to ensure tours continue to live up to the 'dark green' ethos of the company's founders.

We've introduced some new trips on the Mornington Peninsula and Lord Howe Island recently and I'll be travelling to the Kimberly later this year with a view to developing a tour there. I'm also working on a self-guided option on Coffs Coast.

Eucalyptus secrets unlocked

Scientists have sequenced the genetic code of the eucalyptus for the first time, opening up new insights into plant survival, animal behaviour and possibilities for biofuel.

An international collective of 80 researchers spent five years mapping the genome for the *Eucalyptus grandis*, otherwise known as the flooded gum or rose gum, in an effort to learn the secrets of the tree's adaptability, fast growth and valuable oils. The results, first published in the scientific journal *Nature*, revealed almost twice the number of genes as in the human genome.

Research fellow Dorothy Steane, from the University of the Sunshine Coast, said: "[This] provides us with the means to investigate the essential differences between species and to understand how eucalypts have adapted to so many different environments."

The Australian National University's Carsten Külheim added: "The genetic code will help us understand a foundation species of many Australian ecosystems and how these affect other species, from fungi and insects through to marsupials." The identification of genes responsible for producing aromatic oils is expected to help scientists explain the feeding preferences of koalas, and even lead to eucalyptus oil one day being used as a base for jet fuel.

The genome could also provide foresters the resources to develop drought-resilient plantations.

Woodchips

World-class walks for NSW

In May, the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service invited the public to nominate tracks worth transforming into the state's first 'Great Walks' as part of a five-year investment in bushwalking infrastructure. The aim is to replicate the success of Tasmania and New Zealand's multi-day walking experiences by investing in track upgrades, signage and boardwalks. A new network of huts and exclusive licences for commercial operators within national parks have not been ruled out.

Ziplining trend reaches Kondalilla

Plans for a zipline across Obi Obi Gorge in Kondalilla National Park could threaten the local koala population as well as vulnerable bird species such as the grey goshawk and plumed frogmouth, according to the National Parks Association of Queensland. The attraction would likely require a cableway to be installed in the gorge as well as eight so-called cloud stations, to meet its target of 25,000 visitors a year. If given the go-ahead, this would be the first commercial venture inside a Queensland national park since the law was changed last year.

Crackdown on sluicing

Victorian fossickers are petitioning against the state government's proposed ban on the use of mechanical equipment and river sluices in areas of national parks open to recreational gold and gem-hunting. The ban would not forbid metal detectors or shovels, and has been tabled since the declaration of eight new fossicking areas in three national and state parks back in February.

Attenborough returning in 3D

Following last year's sell-out tour, esteemed naturalist Sir David Attenborough is returning to Sydney and Melbourne this November to appear in a new show incorporating 3D and timelapse footage from his latest projects.

Feral cats for the chop

The federal government has called for research into a virus to eradicate feral cats, following the release of research suggesting wild felines kill around 75 million native animals per night. The landmark *Action Plan for Mammals* study revealed that Australian mammal extinctions are 40 per cent higher than previously thought, with 133 falling into the 'extinct or threatened' category.

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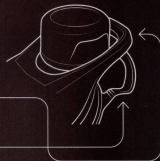
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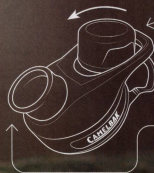
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Brachina Gorge
Photos: Quentin Chester



Flinders keepers

Even when you know a place like the back of your hand, it can still surprise you, writes *Quentin Chester* from his beloved Flinders Ranges

You think you know a place. Then one day things take a turn. You might walk a different track or meet someone new. It might be a lode of history or lore you've unearthed. Whatever the prompt, there is chemistry at work. Suddenly the place appears recharged; brighter and somehow more insistent.

I've been tramping about the Flinders Ranges for more years than I could try to forget. Most visits have targeted a particular spot. In age-honoured fashion my mates and I lob into a gorge or groan up a hill somewhere. It's usually a cheery kind of ordeal. We return home boosted by familiar pleasures: loping about jumbles of colourful rock and hanging out on sharp ridges. My crowd is easily amused. For us, gazing wistfully into desert spaces rates as a highlight.

Every now and then, however, the travels through the ranges have followed a different storyline. These include group tours I've helped guide and 'research' trips for magazine articles. We're talking here about worthy—albeit doomed-to-fail—exercises in seeing it all. There's an itinerary, a representative sample of sights. You skip hither and yon: a drive here, a stroll there and a lookout or two along the way. For anyone whose preferred path of knowing a place is to plod quietly for day after day, such up-tempo snacking can be a torment. Just when a walk is getting interesting, it's time to head back and hit the road. Then there are all the terrific places you whiz right past. Entire landscapes dissolve in a blur. It's the kind of thing that puts wilderness purists in a tiz.

Thankfully, purity has never been my

strong suit. A fondness for things contrary has its rewards. Take Sunset Hill. This well-grazed dome on Alpina Station in the belly of the Flinders Ranges is not the sort of place you'd normally plan a bushwalk around. But it ain't half bad to rattle to the summit in a four-wheel drive, park your bum on the stone bench there and gulp in the vista.

Here you're smack bang in the midst of it all. Up north the pyramid of Patawarta Hill beckons. To the south the peaks of Wilpena and the Heyesen Range squat along the horizon. And due west you gaze through the breach in the ridge that is Parachilna Gorge. It's like one of those sci-fi portals. The view spears straight out of the ranges, out on to saltbush plains and bumpy red dunes to the sheet of salty vastness that is Lake Torrens.

In one pirouette, half a lifetime of walks, campsites and summits-sweated-to is made visible. The thing is, had I not been guiding a group to Sunset Hill this spin with memory wouldn't have taken off. Way down to the south-east I'd recognised another range. And out of the blue I remembered a sunrise atop Mount Carnarvon, the highest blip on this cardiograph of ridgeline; another vantage point that rarely if ever makes it on to a bushwalking hit list.

Were it not for a story-writing mission I doubt I'd have visited the place. I certainly wouldn't have woken an hour before a freezing dawn and bounced in my old four-wheel drive along a gloomy bush track. Nor would I have had photographer Bill Bachman in the passenger seat—or his sly, subversive humour to keep the mood merry as we dipped and climbed through the darkness.

For a while it felt like a fool's errand: the track wound on forever and the sky looked drab. But as we crested the main ridge the view to west yawned open. We paused on a blocky rise and as the sun nudged upwards the puffy underside of the clouds was lit with a flooding pink blaze. It was like waking up inside a watermelon. Way off in the east the toothy rim of Wilpena Pound was aglow.

I looked to the Pound's steep south-east corner. In my mind's eye I saw the top palisade of cliff at Moonarie and at its base a small, lounge room-sized platform of rock. It's what the climber's call Top Camp. Over the decade or so that I climbed at Moonarie I spent dozens of mornings waking at this camp, watching the sun lift over Mount Carnarvon and pour its molten colours across the sheer walls.

Over the next three days, misty cloud sunk low over the ranges. Bill and I roamed through the murk to Warraweena, a private sanctuary north of Blinman. It was unlike any other trip I'd made to this country—before or since. To be cut off from views of the summit ridges for so long was an unnerving feeling, especially as these sharp, serrated vistas are so intrinsic to one's capture of place.

That's also true of the Warraweena precinct. Distant visions of the bulky Mount Hack summit are part of what keep this a bushwalking destination. But we had none of that. Instead, Bill and I found ourselves in swirls of mist, rummaging among the low roll of nearby hills.

In the late evenings the light crept in from the west. As it slid under a cap of cloud this glow lit up the damp ribs of rock until they glistened with a metallic

sheen. Starved of easy photographic subjects, Bill and I puttered about the hills, making the most of this evanescent show.

In these moments there seemed to be a different leverage on the place, a kind of enforced intimacy. Bill would stop to snap a patch of native pines, their trunks dark with moisture and every sprig of bright green growth twinkling with backlit droplets. Or he would be on the ground framing a shot of bleached yellow grass set against the gravel beds of mauve siltstones. Meanwhile, the views back west were of shadowy ridges veiled in mist. It felt distinctly un-arid and almost otherworldly. "It looks like south-west Tasmania," said Bill.

On our ride into Warraweena we had driven past the mostly abandoned township of Beltana. Once a thriving railway and mining settlement, it didn't seem to have a place in our story. Nor did the nearby Beltana pastoral holding. But, guiding a group 10 years later, I finally spent time in the district.

Beltana was one of those towns that became a meeting point and a place of refuge for both travellers and locals. Back in 1879 the great Ernest Giles expedition left nearby Beltana Station on their six-month trek—with camels—to Western Australia. Later, it was where John Flynn kicked off the Australian Inland Mission and had the idea for the Royal Flying Doctor Service.

Here, in the shadow of the ranges, the challenges for whitefellas of making an outback life were transacted year by year. Even though the original rationale for the town has gone, its memory includes the lives of people who found a hard-won kinship with country.

In bushwalking mode it's easy to glide past the history of such sites. The temptation is to fix on to the physicality of landscape and not heed the human experience that shapes its past. Thankfully, guiding 'in country' puts a different twist on your awareness. It makes you see 'your' place with a more open gaze.

For me, the guide's role is a brand of storytelling that helps people shape their own perceptions. I enjoy shared travels in the spirit of a conversation. It's about sharpening a narrative, and toying with the unexpected moment and odd subversive thought.

This is an imperfect business, and one fraught with the risks of repetition and burning out. Nevertheless, I'm surprised how much you can learn by trying to see nature through the eyes of others. Even if people never love a place like you do, at least you might have shared enough to let them

see why it's possible. That said, you still meet folks who struggle to be impressed.

As a young bloke I vividly remember my first ever sighting of a yellow-footed rock wallaby dancing high above my head on a rock face in the Gammon Ranges. At that time the population of these glorious creatures was in steep decline: less than 50 or so individual animals remained in the Flinders Ranges National Park. I wouldn't see another yellow-foot in the wild for nearly a decade.

Fast forward nearly 30 years and it's a mild autumn evening in Brachina Gorge, just north of Wilpena. There, with a group I'm helping to shepherd through this landscape, we spot a pair of rock wallabies calmly munching along a grassy flat at the foot of the gorge. Even in the soft light their fine features, bright markings and long, swishing tail are a joy to behold. It's a special moment, yet all one member of the party could say was: "I hope we see more than this." Silence greeted this remark. Then a few minutes later we rounded a bend to find an entire slope of the gorge dotted with wallabies. In one sweep I counted more than 30 animals, some grazing, others skipping effortlessly up the scree and cliffs above. It was a tremendous sight, a miracle to me, and everyone in my group—even our lone complainer—was entranced. My work was done. Nature had the last word. W



A rock wallaby, joyful to behold

A contributor since *Wild* issue 3, Quentin Chester is the author of several books about wild places. quentinchester.com

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All in a day's work

In his 50th year as a volunteer ski patroller at Thredbo, Barry May talks to *Wild* about mountain safety and the ongoing attraction of skiing in the snow gums

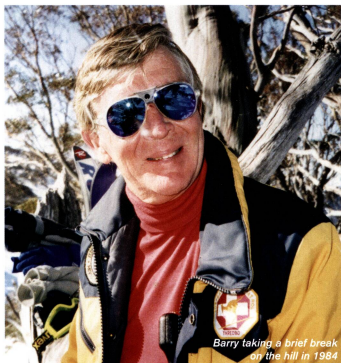
When Barry May started skiing there were no corduroy pistes, no Bluetooth-equipped snow helmets, nor Recco-equipped clothing; you just strapped on your fence post-like skis and headed up Crackenback Peak for a good time. The first time he saw snow, at the age of 26, Thredbo Alpine Resort was a revelation. "Growing up in Narrabeen, I was never out of the ocean, and was working as a commercial diver when a buddy suggested we visit Thredbo one October—I've skied every season since," he says.

When not involved in high-risk underwater construction projects, Barry ran a sports store and shuttled fellow Sydneysiders to Thredbo Village on weekends. The next logical step to maximise his skiing time was to join the resort's ski patrol, which had been founded by Snowy Hydro scheme workers Tommy Tomasi and Danny Coleman in 1958.

He recalls: "In those days you just rocked up to the manager's office with your first aid certificate, did a quick ski check and he gave you a free ticket for the day; you learnt on the job.

"We had no radios so it was simply a matter of keeping your eye open or waiting for the tap on the shoulder that someone was injured."

He describes the development of a reliable



Barry taking a brief break on the hill in 1984

"Patrol is a mixture of great people who live very different and often stressful lives in summer...but always come back together in winter."

digital radio system and high-speed uphill transport two of the biggest milestones in Australian skiing.

Nowadays, new patrollers are expected to do an advanced first aid course and ski test with the Australian Ski Patrol

Association before their practical exams and a probationary season, then complete refresher training at least every three years.

"Training is very protocol-driven these days because our first aid is based on being extra cautious; we 'overtreat' minor injuries in case they are more serious than they first appear," explains Barry. What was then a group of 20 dedicated skiers has grown to around 75 skiers and boarders, a third of which are salaried. After a temporary slowdown during the global financial crisis, Barry says the patrol is now attracting more volunteers than ever.

He adds: "In terms of skier rescue time, Australia probably has one of the best patrol services in the world."

The camaraderie is clearly a key reason for his half-century of service; "Patrol is a mixture of great people who live very different and often stressful lives in summer—including lawyers and doctors as well as young blokes hoping to add a new facet to their skiing—but always come back together in winter."

The 77-year-old admits it took him two days to recover from this year's pre-season get-together, which turned into his 50th anniversary celebration.

The improvements in ski gear and mountainside medical equipment, not to mention snowmaking technology, have changed the job of a ski patroller significantly since the early days of resort



Barry and the family in British Columbia
Photo: Don Cole Harvey

skiing in Australia. Whereas the most common injury on the snowfields used to be a broken tibia and fibula above the ankle joint, top of the list in 2014 are torn knee ligaments, dislocated shoulders and broken collarbones. Barry says: "Higher-cuff ski boots have moved the point of least resistance up to the knee, which might not seem as bad as a broken leg but at least fractures heal completely. A lot of longtime skiers are now suffering with weak knees." He adds: "We certainly didn't used to have the high-speed impact accidents that we see now, a lot of youngsters think they're invincible as soon as they put a helmet on." Reliance on mobile phone coverage and innovations such as avalanche airbags have also made people bolder in the backcountry, or when ducking piste-closure ropes, according to Barry.

"The risks [for backcountry skiers] are unique in Australia, because the nature of our snowfields is that you drop down into heavily lumbered areas from which there is no obvious way out," he says.

"You can be right beside Thredbo in Stanley's Gorge but if you don't cut out soon enough there might be another mile of thick scrub before you can get out." He adds: "As a patroller you come to

recognise the snow conditions so you can predict what the rest of the hill will look like on any given day, but people ducking our ropes often don't consider that the snow might run out 200 metres further down."

Patrollers ski in a criss-cross formation when sweeping the resort, looking for hazards such as exposed rocks and



On patrol in
'the early days'

listening out for the calls of injured skiers. Some of the worst accidents, says Barry, happen just off the piste, including tree collisions and small avalanches.

He recalls the patrollers helping the police search for a missing snowboarder after one big storm. "The patrol director, Dave Kuhn, had this feeling the boarder would be just off the High Noon run but the coppers didn't believe him—we found him 30 metres off-piste, buried when a cornice had fallen on him." This was long after the use of dynamite in starting controlled avalanches had been forbidden in Australia.

While avalanche defence work and less frequent days of heavy snowfall have decreased the risks to skiers at the resort, Barry vividly remembers one day in the late 60s when he was caught in a slide. "The top of the Bluff run always corniced up at the top and it broke as I dropped off it, sliding for a couple of hundred metres. I was squashed heavily on the way down, surrounded by snow blocks bigger than cars, but thankfully the snow was down to a foot-high by the time I reached the treeline," he says. The patrol subsequently cut scrub along the ridge to change the configuration of the cornice. Barry adds: "People forget little slides can be as dangerous as big ones."

While holidaying in the US and Europe, Barry has seen the full destructive power of dry- and wet-snow avalanches, and been involved in rescue efforts. "I was in Alta, Utah, when an avalanche swept through a beginner area and buried three guys. We were up there way after dark working the probe lines. We managed to get one man out alive," he says.

He was also in Thredbo in 1997 when a landslide destroyed two lodges and killed 18 people, including then patrol director Tony Weaver. Reluctant to relive the disaster, Barry recalls: "The slide went past the flat we were staying in, about 150 yards away, but I didn't realise the extent of it until the next morning. It was tragic, and especially hard for a lot of the patrollers who also worked in the fire brigade."

When he talks about treating injuries on the mountain Barry shifts into medic mode, all preciseness and protocol. He explains: "We always carry bandages, slings, field dressings and a pocket CPR mask, and after I have assessed a scene I'll call the relevant team member to bring extra equipment—whether that be a certain splint, a scoop stretcher, oxygen,

or a defibrillator—and an evacuation sled if necessary.”

For all the misconceptions that patrollers are busy skiing secret powder stashes when they are off duty, Barry says the few he enjoyed “once upon a time” are now skied out by the time he finishes his rounds, plus new snow often means more accidents. While he acknowledges the snow season is shortening at Thredbo, he says the maximum snowfall has always varied wildly year-to-year.

He says: “I ski powder whenever I can but the truth is I’m not as wild and hardy as I was, and touring is hard work. Before it was banned, we would rent a Cat for the day and go skiing all over the Main Range.” He also toured with local cross-country skiing icon Ken Breakspear in those days, but is now content to just take in the views from the top of the Karels T-bar at Thredbo or Mount Blue Cow at Perisher. For unskied snow, he heads to Jackson Hole in Wyoming or British Columbia’s Kootenay Mountains.

When asked if he will ever step back from ski patrolling duties, Barry says: “I’m getting pretty close to hanging up



my ski boots, the old knees are getting worn down, but it helps that my wife and five children are all mad skiers.” Having just received the second ever 50-year service medal from the NSW Volunteer Rescue Association, plus letters of appreciation from the state premier and

the prime minister, Barry seems bewildered by the attention. He insists: “It’s just a case of being on the hill and doing what needs to be done.” [W](http://www.thredboskipatrol.org.au)



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TRUE NORTH

Solo walker *Andrew Ranshaw* embraces the Scandinavian right to roam on an eight-week journey across Norway and Finland

Bealljasjauri Lake on Finnmarksvidda
Photos: Andrew Ranshaw





Rotsundalen, Norway



The writer bushcamping in Norway

Every long walk needs a theme and a ramble across Norway and Finland in late summer, from Europe's arctic coast to the Russian border at the western edge of Siberia, seemed like it would take me to the heart of one of Europe's last wildernesses. Aside from the Nordkalottruta (Arctic Trail) west of Kautokeino township, there are few trails for a curious wayfarer to follow this far north, though large swathes of northern Lapland are enticingly designated wilderness or cross-border national park.

My research suggested the high rolling terrain of the Finnmarksvidda (a vast plateau stretching across northern Norway to the Finnish border), followed by the gentle hills of Lapland, to be ideal for a 550-kilometre walk, as long as you keep above the watery pools and bogs that create mosquito heaven in summer.

From Rotsund, which is easily reachable by bus from Tromsø, it's a 150-kilometre (10-day) walk to Kautokeino, the first resupply point. Then comes another long haul to civilisation and the small settlement of Njurgalahti village on the edge of Finland's Lemmenjoki National Park. From here, various guidebooks mention a postbus service to the town of Inari on the shores of Lapland's largest lake. After rest and resupply I then hoped to walk straight out of town to

Saariselka on the edge of Urho Kekkonen National Park, a more reasonable 100 kilometres away. Without a detailed map of this area, I'd be trusting in local knowledge for a feasible route over the Ivalo River. From Saariselka it's a few days walk through the woods to the Russian border post at Raja Joosepi, from where I might board the thrice-weekly bus from Murmansk back to the Finnish town of Ivalo.

READY, SET, GOING

The Lyngens rise to 1,800 metres at their highest and even the peaks around Rotsund, which are mostly below 1,300, are high enough to hold a few small glaciers and form an effective rain shadow across my route to the east. As I hoped, there is a short trail climbing from road's end through the open woodlands and meadows of the main valley of Rotsunddalen on to the plateau. At a rustic hut with a flowery turf roof I meet an elderly Norwegian gent of pine-bark complexion who is curious about my plans. We struggle to understand each other, however, as I have become lazily dependent on the skills of most Scandinavians to communicate perfectly in English.

As enticing as the cosy interior of this fairytale-esque hut is, the long day of arctic summer keeps me moving. It's July 24 and

my GPS tells me the sun will rise again barely half an hour after it has set. The trail fades away as I head above the treeline into the realm of alpine flowers, including countless lilac harebells and white grass-of-Parnassus buttercups.

If I were a bit further south I'd expect to hear the tinkling of cowbells, but domestic reindeer calls are more likely in Lapland. I watch a small herd scamper about the valley as I hunt for the perfect campsite. I later learn that the bulk of this herd—numbering several thousand animals—is driven to the coast and ferried out to summer pasture on the Lofoten Islands. The only manmade structures I come across during the walk are associated with herding, the oldest being the remains of pit traps used by the indigenous Sami people to eliminate wild reindeer in the 19th century. Truly wild animals are incompatible with the practice of reindeer husbandry because the domesticated beasts tend to follow their wild cousins. Where once the herders lived a nomadic life free from the concept of political boundaries, now they are organised into 'villages' with defined grazing areas. I wonder whether these fences separating owners' allotted pastures have isolated wild populations of moose and bear, and there are certainly issues with overgrazing (though

Norway seems better off than other Scandinavian countries in this respect). It may not be untainted wilderness, but this is probably as close as western Europe gets to being in a state of raw nature.

As the gentle gradient eases me above the meadows into the zone of rock and snow patches, I'm joined by a golden eagle. On long-fingered wings it soars to the safety of an inaccessible ridge above a tarn, perhaps to watch over me. Reindeer herders and sheep farmers frequently call for the culling of these large predators, which thrive or falter by the health of the Norway lemming. The anti-social little rodents are conspicuous by their absence this year, though I certainly don't miss their shrill screams.

My route passes into Reisa National Park as the rocky peaks of the Lyngens fade into the rolling plains of the Norwegian vidda. Most visitors see the park from the Nordkalottruta, which emerges from the steep-sided gorge of the Reisa River, but up here on the rolling highlands I see no one and hear nothing but the piping of wading birds carried on the breeze. The lack of lemmings keeps the long-tailed skuas away, but the calls of golden plovers continue to echo out from rocks and grassy mounds. The further I push into this big sky country the more I can hear its timeless, extreme features played out in the traditional singing style, or joik, of the indigenous Sami people.

After a week of fine weather a flash of lightning draws my attention to the horizon, but by the time the storm reaches me it amounts to nothing more than a few sharp showers and the occasional tent-bending blast. These high plateaus are renowned for being windy, but under cloudless skies I am glad of the cooling breeze that keeps the mosquitoes at bay. Rainfall on the eastern side of the Lyngens is relatively low but poor drainage creates countless mires and ponds that make ideal breeding habitat for these pests.

It takes a few attempts to find my way from the plateau down into the gorge of the Reisa, eventually following a power line bound for Storslett on the coast. Such gorges are a feature of northern Lapland but my 1:50,000 maps are not best suited to delineating cliffs and steep slopes.

Among the pylons I encounter a salmon fisherman who has travelled from town in his traditional wooden riverboat with a canine companion. He says the power line follows the only feasible route down steep cliffs to the valley floor. His fishing has not been successful so man and dog float back to town emptyhanded as I continue upriver. Later, in the diary of a trailside cabin I read the comments of two hikers who put back a metre-long fish too big for them to eat.

For the remaining distance to Kautokeino I follow the Nordkalottruta, passing a number of Norwegian Trekking Association (or DNT) huts. As I exit the gorge, the terrain becomes

increasingly marshy and persistent rain dampens both my body and spirit. Around 30 kilometres from Kautokeino I tire of squelching across low ground and take a surfaced road raised above the mire.

Within the hour I'm offered a lift into town and, my trail fitness somewhat wanting, I gladly accept.

Beyond Kautokeino I take a route towards the Finnish border that follows the highest ground away from the bogs and mires, and which offers campsites with awesome views over the remote national park of Ovve Anarjohka. Like much of Finnmarksvidda, the park is a patchwork of birch scrub on eskers with numerous ponds filling the dips. Deeper valleys clothed in pine forest make a nice change from the austere uplands. The only downside is the persistent company of the international reindeer fence, though this does allow me to relax from navigation.

A week after leaving Kautokeino I pass under the border fence and enter Lemmenjoki National Park. At around 2,850 square kilometres the park is Finland's largest, and part of one of the biggest roadless areas in Europe. Whereas trees on the vidda were mostly wind-stunted birch, here open pine and spruce woods cover the ridges, and I get the impression the area enjoys some shelter from winter winds. Streambanks are lush with violet cranesbills and edible Alexanders. Lakes and mires occupy the lower elevations around 250 metres, with dry alpine heath covering the 500-metre-high tops above the forest.

There are few trails here but off-track walking is straightforward enough with infrequent GPS checks. Few hills are distinctive enough to stand out from the map, however, and one mire looks much like another. Within a few hours of entering the park I come upon a moose and her calf. There are droppings everywhere but it's rare to see the animals themselves, perhaps because their satellite dish-style ears can pick

Finland-Norway border cairn



Hiker's hut in Lemmenjoki National Park



Reindeer in Norwegian Lapland

NEED TO KNOW

- In Troms County, I used service 150 Tromsø-Alta disembarking at Rotsund two kilometres along the busy E6 road from Rotsundalen. I recommend taking bus 20 from Tromsø to the campground as it's a few kilometres out of the city. tromskortet.no
- It is possible to get out of Kautokeino by bus if necessary. The town has a Vildmark (wilderness) centre and a couple of campsites. Boreal.no
- Eskelinen Lapinlinjat and Goldline both operate buses in northern Finland, with connections to Tromsø until the end of September. eskelinen-lapinlinjat.com, goldline.fi
- A postbus service operates daily between Inari and Lemmenjoki National Park (Njurkulahti village) in the summer, and taxis are available out of season. inari.fi
- The Murmansk-Ivalo bus usually runs Monday, Wednesday and Friday and stops at the Raja Joosepi border post around 10.30am, but it's advisable to check current times as this is no place to be stranded. Ivalo has two campsites and a specialist map shop. kuopionliikenne.fi
- Screw-thread gas canisters are the most widely available camping fuel, though I came across click canisters and white gas occasionally.
- A freedom-to-roam rule applies across Scandinavia except for parts of Lemmenjoki and Urho Kekkonen national parks (not the outer areas), while campfire rules vary by country and season.

up the sound of humans from miles away. The birds, on the other hand, are remarkably tame and the same species that skulk in the bushes elsewhere in Europe happily sit inches from my face atop branches here. Deep in the pine forest, far from any trail, I come across signs of one of the 30 or so bears said to inhabit the park. Though European bears are mostly vegetarian they have been known to take down reindeer and the occasional cow so it's not a bad idea to emulate the American practise of calling out when their presence becomes apparent in heavy cover. Most Scandinavians I speak to believe bears can hear humans approaching, but having taken several bears by surprise when walking in the US I'm inclined to think they're more reliant on scent. The closest I come to a bruin is the sight of droppings five metres from the door of a wilderness cabin.

A few days later, I encounter other people for the first time in 10 days near the village of Njurkulahti. Thankfully, the postbus driver is happy to accept the Norwegian Kroner I was unable to change for Euros back in Kautokeino and drops me off in the centre of Inari. So far I have been lucky to enjoy one of the driest Lapland summers in many years, and the smoked fish stall and tourist boat on iridescent blue waters create a more Mediterranean than Arctic scene. The climate here, close to Siberia, is continental with frequent warm dry summers followed by frigid winters and temperatures below -40C. I'm relieved to find the museum's information desk staffed by experienced backpackers who immediately suggest a six-day route through the Hammastunturi Wilderness Area occupying the triangle of land between Lemmenjoki and Urho

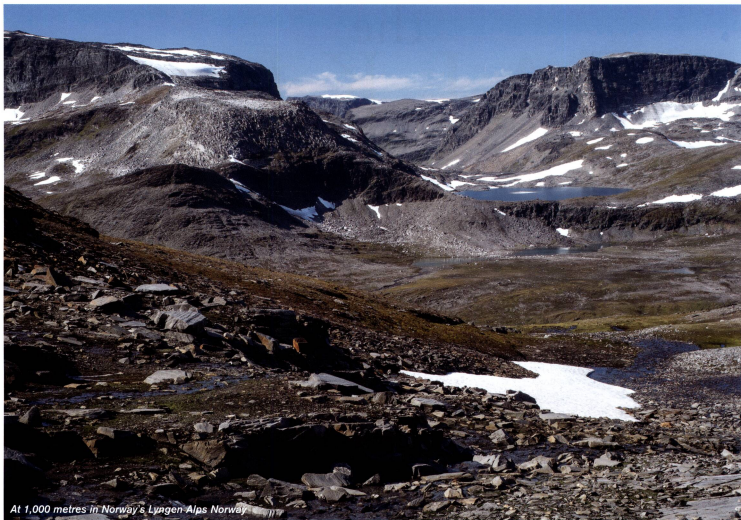
Kekkonen national parks. They point out a footbridge over the Ivalo River at the site of a historic gold rush settlement, from where a short trail leads to the town of Saariselkä.

After a couple of days spent laundering clothes and restocking I walk through the suburbs and back into the forest. The Hammastunturi is one of 12 official wilderness areas in Finnish Lapland, which together make up 15,000 square kilometres primarily used for reindeer husbandry. It seems a little drier than areas further west, with frequent sandy ridges covered in pines and copious photogenic camping spots. In between photography stops I realise I have become unusually dependent on my GPS, what with Finland's topography providing few obvious landmarks.

The northern limit of spruce trees crosses this area and I pass through particularly impressive stands of virgin timber above the river. This open forest is ideal habitat for capercaillie with metre-wide wingspans that, like me, graze on the abundant blueberries. Occasionally I disturb one feeding unseen among the trees and its crashing flight breaks the silence of the forest.

MAPS: Coverage is provided west to east by Turkart's 1:100,000 Nordreisa map; Nordeca's Norge Serien 1:50,000 sheets for Guovdageaidnu (10165), Ahkanas (10166), Njulloasvzi (10163) and Ovve Anarjohka (10164); Kartekeskus's 1:100,000 Lemmenjoki and Hammastunturi Saariselkä; Maanmittauslaitos Maastokarta's 1:50,000 Saariselkä (v521), Kuttura (v443), Appistunturi (v444) and Paatari (v433); and Kartekeskus's 1:50,000 Saariselkä Kilolpaa and Sokosti Suomujoki maps.





At 1,000 metres in Norway's Lyngen Alps Norway

While searching for a direct route down to the footbridge I find tree stumps cut long ago and guess it must be just below me. Coming upon a restored 19th-century cabin—now a logging museum—I notice a photo showing the riverbanks denuded, but more than 100 years of neglect have allowed these trees to return. The population here was once as large as the town of Inari, but today there is just this cabin and a hiker's hut. The trail from Saariselkä terminates here and I meet other walkers for the first time since leaving town. After so much time in the backwoods, I feel a little uncomfortable seeing hiking infrastructure. While the river would be impassable here without the footbridge, the method of trail marking with red two-metre posts seems to me intrusive for such a well-defined path. With easy transport connections to Saariselkä, Urho Kekkonen National Park (name of the country's longest serving president) is more heavily used than surrounding areas. Numerous free cabins are scattered throughout its valleys and a network of ATV trails has sprung up between them, presumably to allow for easier maintenance and removal of rubbish. In keeping with the spirit of the walk so far

I decide to stay away from trails, and a few hours after leaving Saariselkä I'm glad to be heading into untracked forest again, away from the campers clustered around established fire sites in preparation for rain. A direct route east to the Russian border at Raja Joosepi should take only two or three days but I am keen to explore the higher ground of the park and get some views into the Siberian wilderness a few kilometres away. The topography of Urho Kekkonen is better defined than other areas, and numerous hills form long dry ridges above the wooded valleys. Water is scarce above the treeline at the end of summer and camping high involves carrying a few litres up from valley streams, but it's worth it. I gorge on berries as I continue over the park's highest peak (the 718-metre-high Sokosti) and the hills south-east of Saariselkä, then turn towards the Russian border. From the hilltops, there are views over the Siberian taiga forest stretching to mountains on the horizon. I long to creep under the fence separating me from this wilder Lapland, where they say wolves still run free.

By the second week of September the evenings have finally become dark enough

to reveal the blue-green sheets of radiation fluorescing in our planet's magnetic field and I'm treated to a Northern Lights show while camped at the head of a valley. The lights stream down and back and forth like some giant stage curtain: it's unforgettable. Despite the popularity of this park I still come across bear droppings while following a wooded ridge to the Russian border, and later hear that numbers of these animals are increasing now that locals can earn some income by organising bear-watching events. As I approach the Russian border I realise the colours around me have subtly shifted from shades of green to yellow, orange, red and gold. The ruska, or autumn, is starting, when the forest prepares for temperatures as low as -50°C . This is easily the most beautiful time to walk in Lapland. Eight days after leaving Saariselkä I walk into the quiet border post and surprise the officials by asking where I might board the Murmansk bus back to civilisation. **W**

Andrew Ranshaw first visited Scandinavia more than 20 years ago after seeing large blank spaces on an atlas and has since been back numerous times in summer and winter. Currently based in the UK, he sees his next big trip involving the Flinders Ranges.

the WALKING city

The long-awaited Canberra Centenary Trail, which connects national institutions to the surrounding bushland, brings out the local pride in *Michael Masters*

I was nervous. Would this outdoor adventure we had waited 100 years for actually deliver? For a city of bushwalkers and mountain bikers, the creation of a 145-kilometre trail sounded like the perfect way to celebrate Canberra's centenary. The ACT government spent \$3.3 million putting in signage and constructing

18 kilometres of new trail, mainly between Hall and Forde in the north and near Mount Mugga Mugga, as well as upgrading about 10 kilometres of trail between Tuggeronong and Kambah Pool. But with the celebrations drawing to a close, I worried it was going to miss the birthday party altogether. When the Canberra Centenary Trail (CCT)

was finally declared open in October, my partner Katherine and I had only to step out of our front door to begin the walk.

CANBERRA'S BACKYARD

A few minutes later we're on the CCT, having paused to observe a mob of kangaroos on the grass adjacent to our



One Tree Hill Lookout

Photos: Michael Masters

house in Woden Valley. After passing a noisy flock of yellow-tailed black cockatoos eating pinecones for breakfast, we quickly make the steep side trip to the top of Isaacs Ridge. From up here it's easy to see why Canberra is called the Bush Capital; the city is totally encircled. We make short work of the steep descent and continue through the forest to a grand, old yellow box gum that marks the transition from pines to the native forest of Mugga Mugga Nature Reserve.

The lower slopes of Mount Mugga Mugga are part of the nationally endangered box gum woodland ecological community that survives across the ACT. These woodlands once covered much of the lower slopes of the eastern Australian tablelands between Queensland and Victoria, the open areas with grassy cover thought to be the result of Aboriginal land management practices. We follow the trail around the back of Mount Mugga Mugga, past a large abandoned quarry and into the suburbs before taking a side trip up Red Hill. Red Hill is one of the best places in Canberra to view the execution of Sir Walter Burley Griffin's plan for Australia's capital. From

here you can see Parliament House, Old Parliament House and the Australian War Memorial aligned with Mount Ainslie along Griffin's land axis. By lunchtime we're walking through Parliament House's magnificent native gardens. We pause to admire the Federation Stone before heading around Lake Burley Griffin and into Civic, the centre of Canberra, from where we can catch a local bus home—a first in all my years of bushwalking.

TUGGERANONG & MURRUMBIGEE CORRIDOR

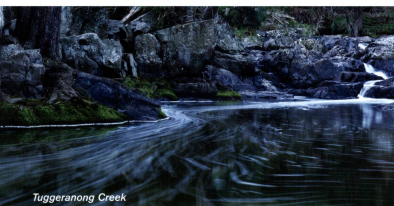
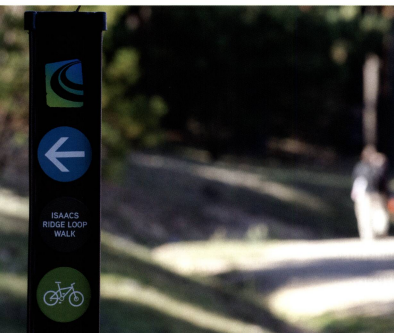
The next we day we're up early and heading south to Tuggeranong, Canberra's southern town centre. After leaving Isaacs Ridge Nature Reserve we pass under Long Gully Road and enter grassland dotted with some of the healthiest eastern grey kangaroos I've ever seen. The largest males, which stand at over 1.8 metres, watch us closely as we wind our way along the fire trail. The rolling hills stretch out before us, without any sign of the suburbs that surround us. This is the kind of solitude

that makes Canberra an ideal place for people who love the outdoors; the city's clever design ensuring the bush is a backdrop to our lives. I wonder how many city dwellers have brown falcons nesting in their yard?

After passing through the small suburb of Macarthur, we follow a watercourse to Tuggeranong centre. Instead of priming the MSR we dart inside a café and catch up with some friends.

After a quick break, our expanded group leaves for Kambah Pool on the Murrumbidgee River. The once mighty Murrumbidgee travels for 66 kilometres through the ACT to meet the Murray River in south-west New South Wales, much of its flow diverted to Lake Eucumbene.

Our first stop is the Tuggeranong dry stone wall built between 1867 and 1875—most likely by convict labour—to mark the boundary between the two pre-federation rural properties of Lanyon and Yarralumla. Soon after leaving the wall, we pass through a small stand of native cypress pines and then come to a footbridge over Tuggeranong Creek. This area is home to the common



Tuggeranong Creek



Walking near the Northern Border Campsite

wombat and we spot a huge burrow just near the bridge. We then head west to rejoin the Murrumbidgee.

The ACT is rich with archaeological evidence of Aboriginal occupation and Canberra alone has more than 3,500 known Aboriginal heritage sites. Evidence of campsites overlooking the river has revealed that the Murrumbidgee corridor was an important gathering place for ceremonies, trading and marriages for the local Ngunnawal people and nearby Ngarijo, Wolgalu, Gundungurra, Yuin and Wiradjuri clans.

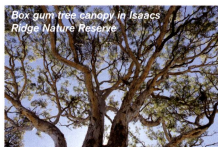
We follow the river, passing through open grassland until we reach Red Rocks Gorge Lookout. The red, brown and grey sediment layers are caused by the oxidation of the iron-rich rock, which is popular with local climbers. I take a very short dip when we get to Kambah Pool, probably scaring the platypuses believed to call it their home.

BUSHFIRE RECOVERY

Our third day walk takes in Canberra's west, which was devastated by the 2003 bushfires. The ACT Bushfire Memorial on the edge of Stromlo Forest Park is a poignant reminder that the bush surrounding Canberra can be deadly. Our next stop is the National Arboretum, which in many ways represents the rebuilding of the city. Located on the site of what was Stromlo Forest, the arboretum is home to more than 90 species of rare, endangered and symbolic trees from around the world. For Katherine the highlight is the 90-year-old cork forest on the northern boundary, while for me it's the Himalayan cedar forest comprised of the first trees planted in the arboretum. Next, we climb the steep slopes of Black

Mountain. This is tough going compared to most of the CCT and about halfway up we pause to catch breath. From up here Canberra is a sea of green and it's hard to imagine that the city was once an overgrazed dust bowl with a serious rabbit problem. Soon after Canberra was chosen as the site for Australia's capital, horticulturist Charles Weston was appointed officer in charge of afforestation. Weston and his successors have done such an impressive job that many Canberraans are unaware that most of the inner-city hills, including Black Mountain, Mount Majura and Mount Ansley, have been revegetated. Weston's 'greening' of Canberra was so effective that the view of the city from the top of Black Mountain is now obscured by a stand of mature eucalypts.

It's getting late, so we head down to Civic



via the Botanical Gardens, stopping in at the pub before once again catching the bus home.

MULLIGANS FLAT TO GOOROYARROO NATURE RESERVE

For this section we jump in the car and head north to Gungahlin. The walking is easy in Goorooyarroo Nature Reserve, where cattle grazing only ceased in 2005 and its effects are more evident than on other parts of the trail. After around six kilometres, we reach a 1.8-metre-high electrified fence marking the start of the 450-hectare Mulligans Flat Sanctuary, named after an Irish convict who lived in the area in the 1840s. The fence was built to remove the threats posed to native fauna by predators such as foxes, and many of the surrounding suburbs have been declared 'cat containment' areas in which owners can be fined if their moggy is found roaming free. In 2012, the fence allowed for the reintroduction of eastern bettongs—the first time since the 1920s that this marsupial has lived in the wild on mainland Australia. After carefully closing the gate, we follow a short section of the Old Coach Road before rejoining the trail. This old road, constructed in 1880, was the main route between early rural settlements in the Canberra/Queanbeyan region and the railway at Bungendore connecting to Lake Bathurst and eventually Sydney. On the northern side of the road are gently sloping fields containing one of the largest remaining stands of kangaroo grass in the territory.

After another kilometre we come to an old woolshed used as an information centre for the reserves. Here you can read up on the Mulligans Flat–Goorooyarroo Woodland Experiment trying to find ways of improving box gum grassy woodland biodiversity.

HALL TO ONETREE HILL

We only have a few hours to walk from Hall, a small pre-federation village on the

The 'greening' of Canberra was so effective that the view of the city from the top of Black Mountain is now obscured by a stand of mature eucalypts.



northern New South Wales border, to One Tree Hill. While the CCT can be completed as a seven-day walk (or three-day bike ride), it is also suited to shorter day walks because most sections are easily accessible. I spot the now-familiar CCT markers in the town centre and we follow them through Hall's sleepy streets to reach the trailhead. The northern sections of the trail were purpose-built and cleverly wind along the border, crossing a number of private properties where cattle graze. After patting a friendly horse in a side paddock, we are nearly run over by a number of speedy mountain bikers who certainly seem to be enjoying the well-groomed trail. A pair of wedge-tailed eagles, with what appears to be a juvenile, circle overhead. This is one of the things that surprised me most when I moved to Canberra over 10 years ago; eagles can be seen even in the most populated parts of the city. The three we observe this time circle for about 20 minutes before being driven away by a flock of smaller birds intent on protecting their patch. We walk for about four kilometres before reaching a sidetrack that winds through a thick stand of eucalypts to the One Tree Hill lookout. Within a few minutes of arriving at the top we're joined by a man and his teenage son, who have accidentally followed

an earlier fire trail to the hilltop. After a customary chat about how great the CCT is, we stand in silence taking in the view. One Tree Hill marks the northern corner of the ACT border and the view of Molonglo Valley from this point influenced Charles Scrivener's recommendations on the boundaries of the capital territory. Today, a fire watchtower looks out over the territory towards the Brindabella Ranges and the Alps.

THE NORTHERN BORDER CAMPSITE

After a busy couple of weeks at work, we decide to spend a 'school night' at the CCT's Northern Border Campground. The campsite constructed for walkers completing the northern section of the trail is about five kilometres from the Mulligans Flat Road carpark and an ideal distance away for a midweek outing. We pass through an impressive turnstile and head for the border. The trail has us following some of the posts, rock piles and tree engravings that remain from when the capital's founders surveyed the proposed border in 1910.

The vegetation here is a sparse, red stringybark forest, while the expansive view over the hills to the north makes it easy to forget the suburbs are less than a kilometre away. Below we can see the Elm Grove homestead, the only property still producing

wool and hay within the Gungahlin area. On a Monday night we're lucky to have the campsite to ourselves. We watch the sky turn pink from the ridge and set the alarm to ensure we're up before sunrise and at our respective desks by 8am the next day.

ONE OF A KIND

It's a freezing Canberra day when we introduce an English friend and his two-year-old daughter to the CCT. As we walk, he quizzes us about plans to spend some time working in the eastern US later this year and how we think our new base will compare to Canberra. When we reach the old yellow box gum near our house, a cold wind blows in off the Brindabella Ranges and Katherine sighs: "It will have big shoes to fill." **W**

MAPS: The official trail maps are not perfect but the route is well marked. GPS coordinates are published at canwalk.org.au and tams.act.gov.au/parks-recreation/recreational-activities/canberra_centenary_trail

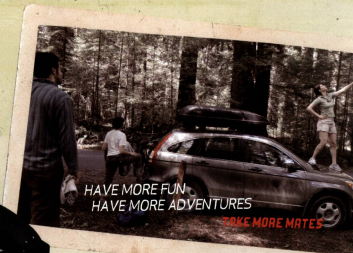
Michael Masters grew up bushwalking and climbing in Victoria and has worked as a photographer in Canberra for the past two years. He is moving Washington D.C. in August, when he hopes to fulfill a childhood dream of climbing the granite cliffs of Yosemite and walking the Appalachian Trail.

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Serene seas

Andrew Peacock shares some dramatic images
from his sea kayaking exploits on the west
coast of the Antarctic Peninsula





Previous page: *Paradise Harbour*
Clockwise from left: *Kayakers from the Akademik*
Ioffe cruise vessel follow the leader across
Paradise Harbour; A 20-foot minke whale joins
the group from the depths of Neko Harbour;
A time for reflection in Paradise Harbour

Sunshine Coast doctor **Andrew Peacock** honed his adventure photography skills while volunteering in the Himalayas. He is fascinated by the dynamism of the polar regions and happiest when combining his passions for photography and medicine with climbing or kayaking. Footloosefotography.com



Lake Hanson in September
Photos: Louise Fairfax

Walk in the park?

Ticking off Mount Emmett in Cradle Mountain-Lake St Clair National Park proves a whole lot trickier than *Louise Fairfax* expected



An expression I found difficult to interpret flashed across the face of the woman opposite when I said: "I want to sleep on Mount Emmett." Was it shock? Disapproval? Did she think I was incapable of reaching a summit that's only around 1,400 metres high—officially 1,404 but 1,410 on GPS—with no cliffs? Maybe she thought I didn't know there's no water up there. I let the moment pass. My first encounter with Emmett, however, revealed what she knew and I didn't: only a fool would lug a tent up there and an even worse fool would pitch it. As time went by I'd catch passing references to Emmett like "once is enough" or "I'm never going back, that's for sure". My curiosity mounted. What could possibly be wrong with this peak? I'd eyed it up on countless occasions from the cirque between Cradle Mountain and Barn Bluff; it looks an easy, rounded hill. From afar this benign-looking mound, named after Tasmanian tourism pioneer and Hobart Walking Club founder Evelyn Temple Emmett, begs you to sleep on it—what a vista it must have! Cradle, so near, must be spectacular at sunrise. As Emmett is slightly east of her, it would be wonderful as the early rays light her eastern dolerite columns. The contours also suggest that at sunset you would see through the gap between Cradle and Barn to the roseate layers of mountains to the west. Thus I fantasised as I continued my plans to sleep there. I have now climbed on Emmett twice but

have never seen any view, let alone the one of my dreams, and I would certainly not be lugging my tent up there along with enough water to fund two meals for two. There is no level surface of any size, let alone of tent dimensions. What I have seen on Emmett are wombat-brown, fridge-sized boulders, all lying at odd angles to each other and mostly presenting a sharp-line edge rather than a plane to the walker who wishes to climb. Anyone without a good sense of balance would topple.

I love playing on boulders and enjoy the challenge of moving up them with as much speed as I can manage. Perhaps Emmett in dry weather would allow that kind of boulder dancing, but both times I have attempted to summit the rocks have been treacherous. The first time, fresh snow obscured the depth of the gaps in between and ice guaranteed slipping. The second time, rain turned the black moss adorning the boulders into a slimy goo so that a single misstep could have you plummeting into the abyss. If you slid unobserved, it could be weeks before they found you at the bottom of that particular crack. On both occasions the view extended to a distance of about 50 metres, as far as the nearest of my companions, with grey travelling vapours filling the spaces between me and the stony chunks around.

Bill Wilkinson's *The Abds Volume One* guidebook, which is in the process of being updated, advises that Emmett can be climbed in a long summer's day but is better done as an

overnighter. Where possible, I always like to take the overnight option, as for me the pleasure is being immersed in nature rather than just ticking off another mountain. I like to linger longer, enjoy the effects of changing light as the day moves on and hopefully hear the sound of birds at the close and start of the day, perhaps catch sight of a few small animals. I've even camped on mountains that it only takes half an hour to walk up just for the sheer pleasure of experiencing the close proximity to that slice of nature for a night.

Last September, an opportunity to climb Emmett with others came up. The group had a compromise position in that they planned to sleep out but at Scott-Kilvert Hut after the climb. Considering the forecast (snow), this seemed like a good idea.

I was as excited as a five-year-old going to a birthday party on seeing snow before we even got to the park boundary, the scene a delicate white fairyland with white powder nestling precariously on filigree twigs and tiny myrtle leaves. It seems apt the forest near the lodge at the official entrance to Cradle Mountain-Lake St Clair National Park is named 'Enchanted'. It is very easy to imagine fairies and goblins in such a magic place, filled as it is with mosses and lichens, and in snow it's even more special.

Near the Dove Lake carpark the myrtle forest no longer dominates, but rather snow gums and bauera help the mountains frame the waters. These too have their beauty enhanced



Mt Emmett

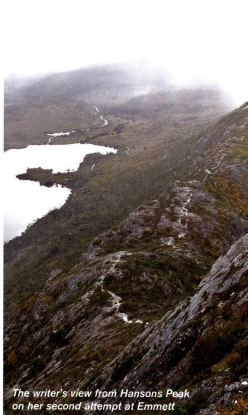
LOUISE'S TOP 3 SUMMIT SLEEPS IN TASSIE

- Sleeping in a blizzard 10 minutes from the summit of Mount Tyndall and waking to find the tent covered in snow with a white fairyland out the flap
- Sleeping on the magnificent Mount Ossa, where we were higher than everything we could see. Just sitting out there up high with a patch of snow nearby and the moon rising as

the sun set was an experience akin to religious

- On Walled Mountain, which I have slept on top of twice; once in the snow four metres (two minutes) below the summit and once during summer about three minutes away beside a tarn. Before the climb, you walk a wonderfully scenic route through the Labyrinth.

What's your best, or worst, experience of sleeping on a peak? Wild is planning an article on summit sleeping and would love to get your feedback on wild@primecreative.com.au



by a dusting of snow resting on their uppermost surface. Travelling in a four-strong group made up of three keen photographers means progress is exceptionally slow. Who could resist taking just one more shot when each additional step exposes a new scene that catches your breath in wonder? Perhaps if we had clicked a little less and walked a little more we might have reached the summit that day, but I doubt it.

From other trips with this group I expected to reach the top of Hansons Peak with a full pack in under an hour, but despite a nice early start we only got to little Rangers Hut—looking like a cottage fit for Hansel and Gretel—in time for a very late morning tea. We didn't get to Scott-Kilvert Hut, which is usually less than two hours' walk, until late lunchtime. When days are short and you want to summit an unfamiliar mountain, this is not good time management. But we were all too besotted by the beauty to notice the time or the cold, and expressed ourselves in such articulate forms as: "Wow...wow...wow!"

After eating as quickly as possible we set off from Scott-Kilvert with daypacks. Having descended slightly below the snow line we momentarily traded the beauty of a white landscape for water-laden bushes that slouched over the narrow track, drenching us as we passed by.

This was prelude to emerging on the Cradle-Emmett saddle and being slapped in the face by the wind that had whipped up during lunch. Snow started falling again and



The boulder dash begins on Mt Emmett

conditions deteriorated to what you'd call a blizzard. We bent our heads low to avoid being stung in the face by the blast and pressed on through untracked territory, up the unnamed hill between the two bigger mountains, neither climbing it fully nor contouring around it but adopting a kind of compromise between the two. We all knew that over the other side is a saddle, but had to get out maps and compasses to determine where such a saddle might be. I couldn't see a thing and was in danger of having the map ripped out of my hands. I began to have grave doubts about the sanity of our mission, but no one said anything, so on we went. The other side of that hill of doubt benefits from plentiful rainfall, and so was covered in luxurious and healthy bushes that slowed us down and drenched us further. The saddle was worse: the shrubbery was well over my head and far stronger than I. Pushing through it was tough and took a lot of energy. We found no pads to help us.

Soon enough, we were confronted with a junk pile of most inhospitable rocks. The snow, being soft, would certainly not hold a person up if they landed in a deeper-than-expected gap between boulders. I looked at my watch and ran a horror scenario through my mind of what could happen if someone slipped and was injured in this weather. We were too isolated for any help to arrive. I spoke up and argued the case for withdrawal—very unlike me. I must have been persuasive though, because a mere 400 horizontal metres from the summit, we turned our backs on our goal.

My second attempt at Emmett was by default, on a four-day trek to climb mountains Inglis and Proteus. Emmett was not on the agenda until the clouds rolled in, dark and laden with rain. The forecast promised rain below 1,000 metres, snow above it, with the heaviest falls due on our second and longest

day, the one originally intended for Inglis. We chopped and changed plans as departure drew nearer, leaving the final Plan Z to be decided when we got to Dove Lake. By the time the seven members of the group came together we had resolved to spend the first night at Scott-Kilvert instead of pushing on to the tarn on the moorland past the belly of Barn Bluff.

We headed up over Hansons Peak with its fun section of via ferrata. This walk is wonderful at any time of year but especially so when the fagus—Australia's only indigenous, cold-climate deciduous tree—displays its autumnal hues, flashes of bright yellow and burnt orange offset against the deep blue of the Twisted Lakes. Mist swirled from the outset, intermittently veiling and exposing the mountains and tarns. We had no urgent destinations and plenty of golden photos to take so we took our time progressing through the variety of vignettes nature provided.

Arriving at Scott-Kilvert before the rain, we hunted for signs of past flooding before choosing a tentsite and then explored the lake. After sussing out a possible route for a later excursion to the Lindon Tarns below Cradle's columns, there were fungi to photograph and new cascades to listen to before retreating to the hut with those who had elected to sleep inside.

Alas, the rains kept their appointment, leading us to settle for Emmett as the new plan. I knew how slimy the rocks would be in these conditions and worried about my husband Bruce, who has Parkinson's disease and is hampered in his coordination and balance as a result. Should I stop my own husband doing something he said he wanted to give a go? I decided not to hinder him with my own anxieties, but watch him closely and perhaps suggest dropping out a bit later.



I was anticipating a total horror zone of stacked slippery dips, which it was. I actually share a toddler's delight in climbing slippery dips the wrong way, but the gaps between rocks were indeed treacherous. You had to make sure three of your four limbs were in good rock contact all the time. Part crab, part cat, I made height and enjoyed this increasingly as we went and I gained confidence.

Every now and then we regrouped and I saw, to my amazement, that Bruce was still making steady progress, doing better without me as a backstop. A different person travelled near him throughout so I was free to enjoy the exhilaration of the climb at my own pace.

I couldn't believe it when I recognised the form of a cairn ahead in the mist. We'd done it! It snowed lightly while I waited for the last members of the group to join me on the top. We had no purview, but the shape of my husband's head materialising out of the mist after one of the most challenging climbs he has done since being diagnosed 11 years ago was the best possible view for me. I can't begin to imagine how much courage it takes to launch yourself at the mercy of such demanding conditions when you don't have full control of your limbs. Another

family I know who tried to summit that same day gave up. It seems Emmett is a mountain of good intentions but little success for would-be conquerors.

AND ONE FOR LUCK

The forecasted bad weather continued to hover over us for most of the trip, adding spice rather than ruining it. The Mount Inglis day was to be a long one with 35 'kilometre equivalents', whereby you add a kilometre for every 100 metres climbed, so we set out from Waterfall Valley Hut at 8am. Even so, we only just made it to the summit with about 10 minutes to spare before our agreed-upon turnaround time. Having made it though, we felt relaxed and satisfied as we played the normal game of naming the mountains around us while we ate, recounting fun adventures had on this or that one. From that vantage point, you could see all the landmark mountains of the northern half of the Overland Track. The huge stretches of moorland lay at our feet like a grased ocean between us and our mountains, evoking a sense of infinite space. The return journey was necessarily efficient and purposeful. The weather was closing in again, bringing premature darkness and loud, invasive wind. Everyone worked hard to make sure we were back in the protection of



Climbing Hansons Peak

the hut by 5pm, before the threatening storm arrived. As I cleaned my teeth by the tank after dinner, lightly falling snow caught the light of the hut and illuminated the darkness like fireflies.

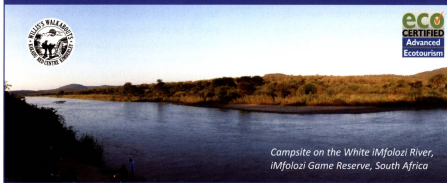
On the final day, snow dusted the landscape all around as we climbed up on to Cradle Cirque from the hut. I love climbing quickly so was fortunate to be in the lead and have the entire landscape to myself. The path was a series of ice ponds with sparkling crusty lids; the boarded sections a band of white icing leading through white bushes. Bright yellow gilled fungi survived the conditions to colour the scene like fairies' umbrellas and I noticed tiny footprints of quolls, wallabies and wombats on the duckboard. I hated putting my own huge feet down and destroying the delicacy of the story of their journey.

The truth is I haven't given up the idea of sleeping on Emmett, but I'm better prepared now. I won't take a tent and possibly won't even cook up there, but I will take my sleeping bag and mat; I'll do it in summer when the forecast is good and will perch in as supine a position as the rocks will allow. Maybe I will fall asleep, maybe not, but either way I'll enjoy a night watching the stars and the changing light, will breakfast down at the tarn later, and catch up on sleep some other time in some other place. **W**

Mountain runner and bushwalker Louise Fairfax is a regular Bushwalking Australia photography competition winner and avid blogger, showcasing the wild places of Tasmania in weekly posts at natureloverswalks.blogspot.com.au

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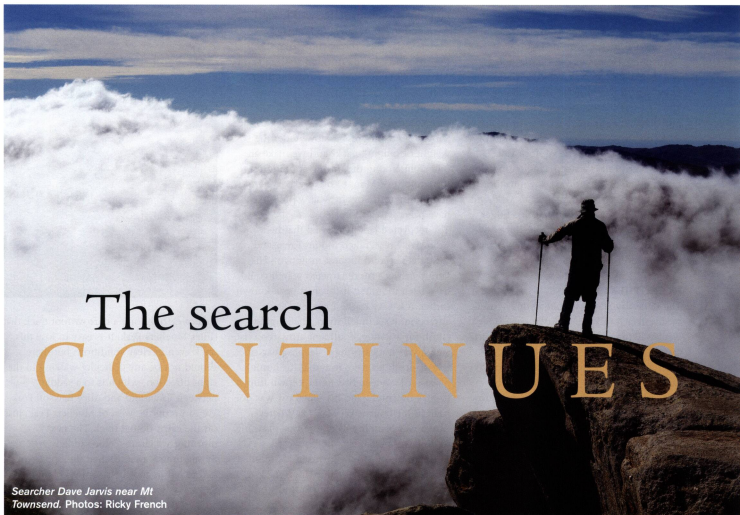


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The search CONTINUES

Searcher Dave Jarvis near Mt Townsend. Photos: Ricky French

A year on from the disappearance of Canadian hiker Prabhdeep Srawn in the Snowy Mountains, *Ricky French* picks up the trail

On May 14, 2013, visiting 25-year-old bushwalker Prabh Srawn vanished off the face of the Earth. Narrowing it down, you would say he vanished off the face of Mount Townsend, but narrowing it down is a difficult thing to do in this case. So little is known of Srawn's movements, intentions, supplies and experience, that piecing together his final steps has become a game of guesswork and supposition. It's a case crying out for closure. The first sign Srawn was missing was when he failed to return his Juicy rental van. He had disregarded the most basic rule of bushwalking: tell someone where you are going. No one missed him for over a week, meaning Srawn could come to ruin without hope of rescue. The police remained sympathetic during their two-week scouring of the mountains, but came to the conclusion that Srawn's fate was, in essence, inescapable. Generally diligent, the police missed one huge clue in the form of

a laptop concealed in the abandoned van. Srawn's Canadian-based family, savagely critical of the police decision to call off the search, has continued to fund private searches. When winter searching was called off, they returned in November with a Canadian search and rescue team in the hope the snowmelt would reveal a body, or even a miracle. The distance has forced the family to rely on local help, including Sydney man Dave Jarvis. I know he has put more days into the search than anyone and when I contact him he claims he knows where Srawn's body is. We meet in Jindabyne on Good Friday. Jarvis is a fit-looking 50-year-old, slim and agile as he bounds up a small embankment to greet me. Sometimes furtive, sometimes open, he's suspicious; a loner but also a craver of ears to hear his stories. There's intensity to everything he does. He doesn't relax, doesn't take anything lightly. "I've sat here and watched Prabh's mother cry every day," he says. "I've got some stories to tell."

I am introduced to 59-year-old Peter Effler from Melbourne, a member of the Australian Swiss Search Dog Association. His German shepherd Jochen helped investigators find human remains after the Kinglake fires of 2009 and has provided a vital clue in the search for the body of Srawn. Last spring, before a blizzard forced the party to abandon the search, Jochen picked up scents in the Western Fall Wilderness and 'alerted' three times. Now we are going back to that spot. Jarvis tells me he is a motor mechanic, remote communications technician, health and safety representative and has worked in the Northern Territory, the Solomons and Papua New Guinea. "You're not really taking those shoes are ya?" he asks after eyeing me up, then adds, possibly as a warning: "I'm very verbose." We pore over the map, marked with GPS tracks taken by previous search parties. It's a mass of lines that obliterate the plateau and peaks of the Snowys. "So the tops have

been well-searched?" I ask. "Oh shit yeah," exclaims Jarvis. He repeats this phrase whenever something needs vigorous reaffirming. He points out Charlotte Pass, where Srawn's van was found; "We don't know which direction he was walking, we know he slept in his van on May 13 and probably left early the next day. All we have to go on are mobile phone pings and dog alerts—both point to the Western Fall." The Western Fall is a steep, tangled mess of bush and creeks that drops down to the west of the Snowy Mountains. It's wild and rarely ventured into. Jarvis taps his finger on some tightly packed contour lines on the map. "It looks pretty steep," I say. Jarvis looks me in the eye; "Oh shit yeah."

IN ANOTHER'S SHOES

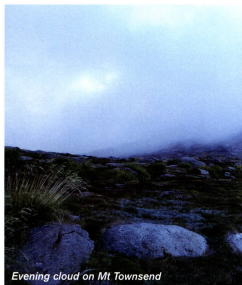
The same day Srawn set out, Sydney-based bushwalker Tom Batty and two friends also went walking on the Main Range. The trio carried full wet-weather gear and emergency supplies, as well as a video camera. The YouTube footage shows the men driving up under blue skies, but snow starts falling only a few minutes into the walk. Thick cloud rolls in. By the time they reach the Main Range Track snow has blanketed the mountains and visibility is down to 20 metres. The wind kicks up intense snow flurries, but the group has

no problem sticking to the well-formed track and makes it safely to Seamans Hut. The next day they throw snowballs and goof around before returning to their car. The party saw no sign of Srawn on their walk, so how close they came to him we may never know.

Easter Saturday sees daywalkers flock to the Snowys. Our progress is slow under the weight of bulging packs and we make an odd sight among the throng strolling up to the summit of Mount Kosciuszko. We are attempting to follow in what would likely have been Srawn's footsteps.

The recovered laptop showed that he extensively researched Mount Townsend, Australia's second highest mountain. His family insists a more targeted search could have been mounted if this had been known earlier. It is easy to see Townsend's attraction: it's a much more challenging climb for a young, confident army reservist. Srawn was not carrying a sleeping bag or tent (since both were found at his home), his sister Mandeep had never known him to hike overnight and his rental car was due back in Melbourne on May 15. Whatever Srawn was planning to do, he was planning to do it in one day.

The summit of Mount Townsend is reached by branching off the Main Range Track at Muellers Pass and following an indistinct



Evening cloud on Mt Townsend

trail of cairns along a narrow foot track that sidles Muellers Peak. It is easy to lose this track even in clear conditions but there should not be any difficulty walking in the right direction, which is to a saddle between Townsend and Alice Rawson Peak. We camp on the west of Muellers Peak, just off the cairn-dotted track. The next morning we climb to the saddle. By the time Srawn reached this spot, cloud had rolled in and the storm was building. Snow was gathering and the wind was



Snowy River and Main Range Track from Charlotte Pass

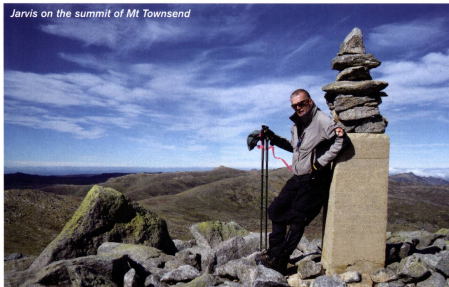


funneling up the Western Fall. He would have still been able to make out the imposing bulk of Mount Townsend though, and it would have been tempting to attempt a climb, having come all this way. We pick our way through the boulder field leading to the summit. Devoid of snow or ice the boulders present no real danger, though large crevasses appear between some and you would not want to fall here, especially if you were alone. Srawn would not have seen anything from the summit, only thick cloud and falling snow. Objective reached, he would focus on descending and getting back to the Main Range Track.

Back down on the saddle we fan out and consider Srawn's options. To the north the land drops off steeply into Lady Northcote Canyon, a crumbling near-vertical abyss. We stand on a rock outcrop and peer down into the mist that rises up to cloak the canyon's jagged interior. About a week after Srawn went missing, a person at Opera House Hut (deep in the canyon) reported hearing something that could have been a voice calling 'Hey' or 'Help'. The area was searched. I ask Jarvis if anyone walked down into the canyon from the top. "Yes," he replies immediately, "Me."

Jarvis has spent more than 80 days searching for Srawn, so he has seen the best and worst of the search efforts. The Srawn family famously offered financial inducements to volunteers during the private search phase in winter. A stipend of \$250 per day was on offer, as well as a grand prize of \$100,000 should Srawn be found dead or alive. I ask Jarvis what sort of people this brought to the hills. He describes a man who appeared to have trouble making out obvious landmarks, and later admitted he had broken his glasses the previous week. "This clown was meant to be searching, looking for small clues," says Jarvis. "We dragged him

Jarvis on the summit of Mt Townsend



around—effectively blind—for 10 days, then he pockets \$2,500 and goes on his merry way. He was just a uni student looking for a quick cash injection." Another pair he met walked up to Seamans Hut along the main road, stayed there overnight drinking a bottle of whisky, strolled to Rawsons Pass and back out the next day, then claimed their \$500.

Surely Jarvis has raked it in then? He says: "I've asked that any gear I break be replaced, and I've accepted a small amount of money for travel costs, but as far as this stipend business goes, forget about it. I've lost a load of money. I'm doing this for his mother and because Prabh's my brother. He's a fellow hiker, yeah? That means he's my brother."

CATCHING THE SCENT

Effler holds up his GPS. "The dog alert zone is one and half kilometres in this direction," he says, wagging a finger at the Western Fall. It was also in this direction that two mobile phone pings were picked up between 1.30pm and 3pm on May 14. After that Srawn's phone went silent. For some reason he moved into the Western Fall and never made it out.

Why would Srawn come down from Mount Townsend to the saddle then make his way into the steep, unknown bush and biting wind, away from Charlotte Pass and his van? It could be he took a fall climbing down from the summit, perhaps twisted an ankle heading off the boulders. He would instantly be in a life-threatening situation. Alone, without a tent, sleeping bag or extra clothes, Srawn would have to act fast. The nearest shelter at Seamans Hut would require a journey of nearly eight kilometres on the exposed tops through a blizzard—too far for someone incapacitated by injury. Otherwise, he could have either taken shelter on the tops or decided to go down

into the bush to hide from the bad weather. "It's a natural funnel," says Jarvis, gesturing down to the west of the saddle and indicating where the mountain drops away, gently at first but becoming steeper as two sides of a valley converge. I agree. If you were trying to get down in a hurry, this is where you would go. Srawn may have been too injured to risk an arduous trek through a blizzard on the tops, but he may have been able to limp downhill to the bushline. If Srawn had attempted to walk out via the Main Range Track, or walked anywhere within the main plateau tops and perished there, his body would have been found by now. In clear weather it's easy to search the gently undulating hills and treeless landscape. And searched it was, repeatedly, both by helicopter and on foot. As far as we can be certain about anything in this case, we can be certain he's not there.

An early clue during the initial search last winter seemed to confirm this. A plastic water bottle was found on a track called Hannells Spur, a tough, overgrown route through the Western Fall that Jarvis describes as the "worst track in Australia". The bottle came from a tour operator called Pro Dive Cairns, and Srawn had been diving in Cairns the previous December. Hopes soared, but further investigation revealed that he had been diving with a different company. Also, the spot on Hannells Track where the bottle was found is very close to Geehi Flats, the Alpine Way road and Doctor Forbes Hut; on the doorstep of civilisation. If he had made it this far he would effectively be home free, except for crossing the flooded Swampy Plains River probably exhausted and hypothermic. The mystery of the water bottle remains one of the conundrums of the case.

We drop into the gully. Laid out before us are endlessly repeating layers of dark green hills, building upon each other all the way

to the horizon. In the foreground is Geehi Flats, the grassy campground at the fork of the Geehi and Swampy Plains rivers. It looks almost within shouting distance, but it's in fact over seven kilometres away through some of the toughest terrain you can imagine.

Small trees spring out of the alpine grasses as we get lower. A huge rockfall provides the best option for us to pick our route down into the ever-narrowing gully. The rockfall gives way to a creek, which sends water tumbling over boulders the size of small houses, the flow gathering momentum in a rush to reach Geehi River. We're forced to push our way through the shrubs and the small, stiff alpine trees. Donning full protective gear, we half-walk half-fall through the vegetation, compressing the canopies with our weight until the branches reach maximum flexing point and either support us or snap. Jarvis leads the way and calls out the steps; "I'm walking on canopy, three steps, big hole here, hold the rock to the left, making my way to that tall branch there...how's the route look to your right Peter?" It goes on like this for two hours, during which time we progress only a few hundred metres. Ever so slowly a clump of trees that Effler calls the 'alert zone' comes into view. It's time to make camp: Effler on a rock, Jarvis on a thick canopy of shrubs, me among the dirt, roots and wombat tracks. At night the lights from cars on the Alpine Way and campers at Geehi Flats look tantalisingly close. Was this a fatal deception for Srawn?



The creekline the writer followed into the Western Fall

TO THE LIMIT

Easter Sunday in the Western Fall dawns with Jarvis and Effler studying the GPS. Jarvis points down to a bend in the creek; "You see that big rock? How the creek bends round to the left? Up on that ridge is the alert zone and down there in the creek, that's where I expect to find him." We slowly pick our way down the creek, lowering ourselves over rocks, pushing

through trees and waist-high undergrowth, feeling every step with our feet before deciding if it is safe to put weight down. It is every bit as hard as Jarvis promised; it's leg-breaking country.

We have frequent stops to gather our breath and thoughts. "He's just got himself into a situation he wasn't prepared for," Jarvis offers. He goes quiet, and stares down into the Western Fall. "I'm coming Prabh," he says, intently, "I'm coming brother." Progress is so slow it hardly counts as progress. By mid-morning we can still see our packs, left up on a big rock at the campsite. But the worst is still to come. We need to leave the creek and climb through the bush to the alert zone, to follow the line of the dog's scent back down to the creek. It takes every bit of strength to muster a step against gravity and the barrage of trees. We are only a few metres apart from each other but always out of sight. "Have ya got a whistle?" shouts Jarvis. "If you fall and break your jaw you can't shout, at least with a whistle you can shove it up your nose and blow." "Thanks," I holler back, pushing aside a mass of unyielding sticks wrapped around my face. "I'll remember that." We're supposed to be searching as we go, but it's a full-time job just to go. We finally haul ourselves upon a small clearing, which is where Jochen alerted. Effler sits down and does not get up for a while. Jarvis observes him for a moment and decides





he is overheating. We get Effler to take off two layers of clothing and drink some water. He is breathing heavily and seems groggy. Jarvis looks around him at the unending mass of trees and wilderness; "I don't know how much longer I can keep coming back here. I've found two-dollar coins down in the bush. I see a lot. But Prabh? All this searching – nothing. Nothing whatsoever. No clothing, no sign." I sip some water and join Jarvis in contemplating the situation. It would be pure chance if we found Srawn here. We would have to literally stumble over his body. He could be lying two metres to the side of us and we wouldn't know. Jarvis takes a deep breath and pulls his hat down tight. "C'mon gents, let's make our way back down to the creek, spreading out as we go, that's where I fully expect we'll find him."

Srawn's last mobile phone ping suggests he had been making his way down here for a couple of hours. If he followed the natural fall of the land down the creek he would be standing roughly here. Injured, freezing and desperate for shelter and warmth, he would have pushed through bush, away from the dampness of the creek, into the thick of the Western Fall. His phone by now was either flat or not able to make emergency calls. It is likely he may have suffered further injuries in the treacherous conditions and become immobile. He would know that no rescue party would

assemble. Coming from a deeply religious Sikh family, he may have prayed to Waheguru and lay down to sleep. The best we can hope for is that death came quickly as the storm raged and darkness fell.

EVERYDAY HEROES

Jarvis bends down and picks up an animal dropping. "Probably a wild dog," he suggests. He breaks the small, cylindrical dropping in half and studies it. "I'm looking for signs of protein, any sign it may have been feeding on Prabh."

Later, he expresses reservations about drinking the creek water, in case Prabh's body is polluting it. Jarvis sees Prabh everywhere he looks; in every broken branch ("this was broken by someone else, not us") and every sturdy tree ("this would have been a good place to get out of the wind and try to start a fire"). His life seems to flash back and forth between the present day and May 14, 2013.

We fight our way back to the creek. It dawns on us the folly of even attempting to search the bush up the sides of the creek; you would need 100 fit people and 100 days to comprehensively search just a few hundred square metres. At least in the creek progress was possible, just.

I tell Jarvis I'm going to follow the creek back up to our packs, searching as I go, and then camp on the tops, because there is no point in even trying to penetrate the surrounding banks and bushes. He looks at me like he was expecting to hear this, like he's used to people bailing early. He gives me a send-off speech: "Just remember no one's searched this area yet, it's too tough. The police wouldn't come here. Those guys who pranced around the tops, claiming their money and thinking they were heroes, they're not heroes. Who are the heroes?

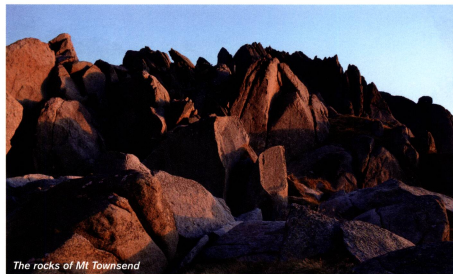
I'm looking at two of them right now."

"What are you two going to do?" I ask. Effler is battered, bleeding slightly from a cut just above his eye, and his gaiters are ripped apart. He says: "I think we come down here tomorrow and search up and down a little bit more on the sides of the creek." Jarvis nods; "We'll do it, we'll do just a little bit more."

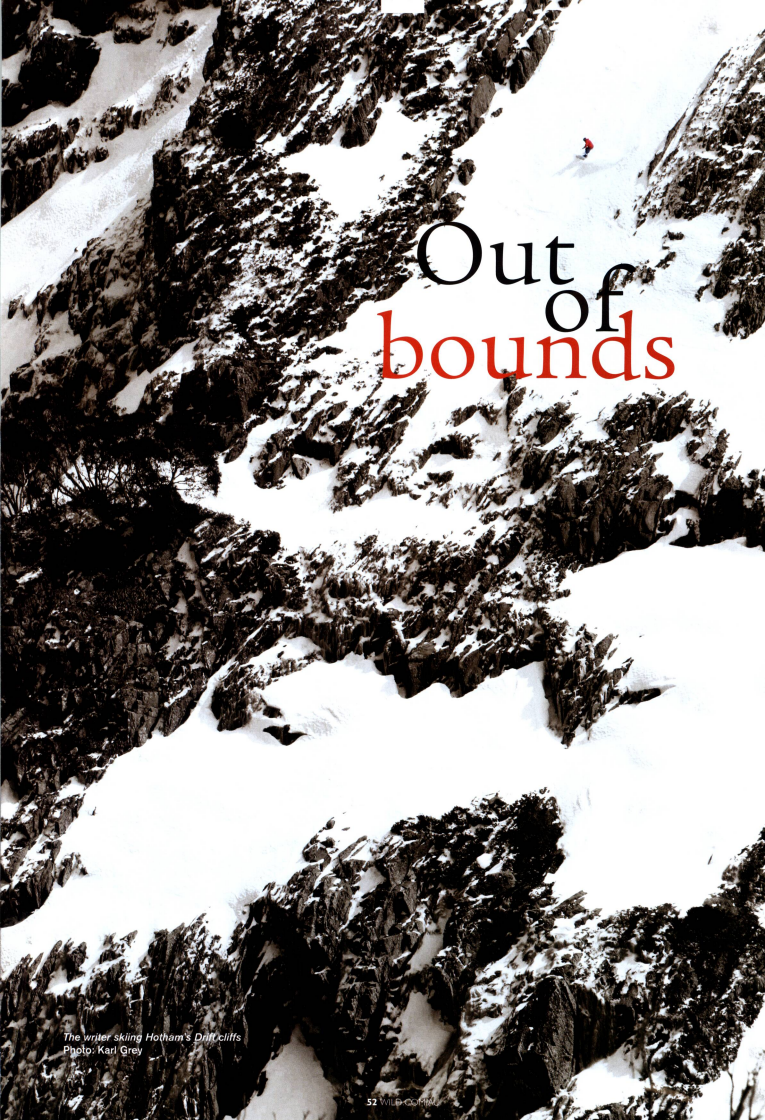
I'm back up under Mount Townsend in a little over an hour. I climb and bash and hike like I never have before. My legs strain and scream for more muscle as I take giant strides up rocks, my heart working frantically to push oxygen around my body. I sweat and strip down to a t-shirt and shorts. I'm alone and free in the mountains, and immensely happy.

That night I choose a camping spot beside a stream just under the saddle between Mount Townsend and Abbot Peak. The grass is soft and fluffy and from my tent flap I look out to Mount Kosciuszko. At sunset I walk up to the saddle and peer into the Western Fall, over the Geehi Flats, over all the layers of hills upon hills. The ancient rocks where Bogong moths have darted for centuries are bathed in warm orange light as the sun melts itself into the low clouds. There is no wind. No sound. It seems ridiculous that this spot can be a scene of howling gales, blizzards, and a wandering soul wandering to his death.

Walking back to my tent my mind drifts to the last sentence of the Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*, which reads: 'I lingered round...under that benign sky; watched the moths fluttering among the heath and harebells, listened to the soft wind breathing through the grass; and wondered how anyone could ever imagine unquiet slumbers, for the sleepers in that quiet earth.' **W**



The rocks of Mt Townsend



Out of bounds

The writer skiing Hotham's Drift cliffs
Photo: Karl Grey

Powder hound *Sam Leitch* considers the shift in winter backcountry use and some of his favourite Victorian ski destinations

The increasing expense of skiing in Australian resorts in comparison to ones overseas has helped to make backcountry terrain more attractive to both cross-country and downhill skiers. Before the emergence of alpine touring (AT) or randonnée bindings—which allow the user to switch between free and fixed-heel mode—with heel lifts in the 1970s, and then alpine binding adapters and frameless pin-system tech binders in the 80s, touring meant skinny skis with telemark bindings and soft leather boots. The range of set-up options available today is vast: from a beefy Salomon frame binding, alpine or stiff AT boot and powder ski for aggressive downhillers not concerned about weight; to a lighter Marker or Fritschl frame binding and more flexible boot on an all-mountain ski; to a high-end AT boot compatible with a Dynafit or Plum tech binding on a lightweight ski. Binding adapters are still available from a couple of North American brands but not reliable enough for most skiers. Of course, the best combination of ski, binding and boot varies greatly from skier to skier, and a compromise between downhill and approach performance is inevitable, but Australia offers some excellent sidecountry in which to suss out what you prefer.

Meanwhile, snowboarders willing to get out the saw or invest in a ready-made splitboard—which effectively converts into two cross-country skis for use with binding adapters—are no longer restricted to bootpacking. Buller, Falls Creek and Hotham all offer some fun sidecountry that you can access by traversing from chairlifts and then walk out from with skis on your back. While the strong westerly winds that accompany our snowstorms can leave windward aspects scoured and icy, leeward aspects can hoard stashes of powder. Hazards in areas like this, however, include hidden rocks (or 'shark fins') and avalanches. Mounts Bogong and Feathertop reign as Victoria's king and queen with altitudes just under 2,000 metres, but I also recommend Mount McKay and The Fainters. All these mountains are enjoyable to ski in spring when daytime temperatures reach well

above zero and the melting base provides corn or 'hero' snow that's just the right mixture of forgiving slush and grippy crust.

The more you learn about the mountains, the more you realise you have to learn about risks arising from avalanches, rockfall, bulletproof ice, exposure and whiteout weather. If you have a big mountain objective such as Bogong for your first ski touring experience, go in spring not winter. By mid to late September the snowpack tends to consolidate into a melt/freeze cycle, and slush is a lot safer than trying to score powder early on in the season. Below I've collected some of my own recent experiences to give novice and lapsed alpine tourers who like the steep an idea of what to expect out there.

HOTHAM

Winter 2012 was a benchmark for local skiers with the base layer hitting the magic two-metre mark in late August. Areas that had not been skiable since 2004 and 2000 were once again accessible, including some of the steepest, longest and most exposed lines in the country down the Australia Drift slope on

Hotham's south face (below the t-bar). The sidecountry at Hotham is unique in that it can be reached in a few minutes, and takes just 20 to 30 minutes to bootpack out, but the Drift is reserved for skiers who are highly experienced in steep terrain—it's a no-fall zone—and is usually only advisable in September or October. After a weeklong storm in August, I was one of about four skiers and boarders escaping the Saturday crowds in the Heavenly Valley to tackle the Drift cliffs. I fitted in three solid runs, and a number of photos from the day made it into ski and snowboarding magazines, though one of the other skiers had to be picked up by ski patrol after blowing his knee out on a big drop.

For the same sort of steepness but safer runs I recommend checking out Dargo Bowl south of the firetower on the summit, or the basin between mounts Blowhard and Baldy. There are also some fun runs on the east side of Mount Loch, which you can access easily from the top of the Orchard chairlift.

FEATHERTOP

The south-east face of Mount Feathertop looked the best I have ever seen it



Feathertop from Hotham
Photo: Hotham Alpine Resort

mid-winter 2012, except for the notoriously giant cornice looming dangerously over the terrain. I knew from previous trips that what you cannot see from Hotham is the bottom of Feathertop's couloirs, which host a dangerous choke of rocks, shards of destroyed snow gums and ice chunks the size of cars. Getting flushed into these by an avalanche would be a death sentence, so I held out until the weather hit the spring cycle. [The summit of Feathertop and highest section of the Razorback Ridge are prone to icing up—in August 2011 veteran backcountry skier Guame Nelson slid to his death in *Avalanche Gully*.]

By late September, when the cornice had crumbled away and the snow had stabilised into a melt/freeze pattern, I could see my dream of skiing the Razorback in corn snow becoming a reality. I was fortunate to have a companion in Buff Farnell, a highly experienced skier and alpinist. When a high-pressure system moved in and created a calm afternoon for it, we put on our skins at the southern end of the Razorback and set out for Federation Hut about 11 kilometres away on the shoulder of Feathertop.

By late afternoon the wind had completely died, the temperature was mild and the snow soft. We covered half the distance in less than two hours. Bedroom lights flicked on in the Owens Valley below as darkness fell but we could still see easily by the bright moonlight. It was an amazing sensation to be warm and skinning through a black and white vista. The second half of the Razorback became more convoluted, however, and left us highly exposed from the right. Before long, a niggling pain developed in my right knee on my downhill side.

The snow started to freeze around 10pm when we were still a few kilometres from the hut, and the trail ahead took a steep left turn through the thickly treed end of the Razorback. Buff suggested bivouacking rather than aggravate my knee further but I was craving the security and satisfaction of reaching the hut and its wood stove. Remembering I had a pair of slip-on Vans in my pack, I announced I would finish the journey in those. Buff laughed and skinned ahead. My knee felt better, but my soft treadless shoes were useless as the route got tighter, steeper and more frozen.

I eventually crawled into the hut at midnight totally destroyed. We woke to another perfect day and walked the short distance to the summit with our gear. I knew I would not be able to ski the way I wanted with knee pain and sat sulking at the top as Buff dropped into Hellfire Gully—the terrain I'd been dreaming of all season. I was shocked out of my sulk when freeskiers Tom and Simon Costa burst on to the summit behind me, having come up from the Mount Beauty side. They wasted no time in slaying 600-metre lines down 'my' terrain while I waited for Buff to bootpack back up after his own 300-metre ski. I reminded myself that the climb out would have been agony, and felt a bit better after drinking some wine in the afternoon sun. The next day we walked the nine kilometres down to Harrierville via the Bungalow Spur in about four hours. If I am lucky, and the right conditions and companions present themselves, I hope to claim my own line his year. The chutes beyond Hellfire Gully that drop back into it, and the eastern side of the Razorback where it meets Diamantina Spur are also on my list.

GEAR CHECK

Oliver Handsjuk, of Ajays Snow Country Sports in Melbourne, talks Wild through some ski gear trends

"Back- and sidecountry skiing is definitely attracting more people as our resorts get more expensive, though most opt to adapt their downhill gear rather than make the full switch to an alpine touring set-up when they realise lightweight bindings cost upward of \$800. We are getting close to a 'one-binding quiver' now you can get tech bindings with shock-absorbing elasticity and release value at the toe, similar to a DIN-certified alpine binding in that it allows you to ski safely on crud and bumps—not just on unskied snow. Ski brands basically divide into those who design from the ground up with walking in mind, such as Scarpa and Dynafit, and the alpine ones retrofitting downhill gear. The products aren't comparable but if you only do two days a season in the backcountry the latter can work for you. I've seen randonée racing boots that weigh a third of the downhill equivalent but cost around \$3,000. Then you have Salomon's Walk to Ride-certified frame bindings compatible with flat-soled alpine boots and certain touring boot soles, which

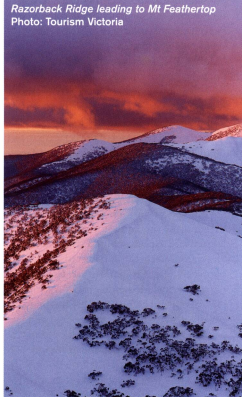
the brand released to address the fact that some bindings described as releasable don't actually release lugged, rockered soles cleanly. Since our terrain is either steep or rolling but nothing in between, and the range of AT gear we get shipped in is limited, Australia hasn't undergone the shift away from telemark touring and bootpacking that the US has. Splitboards unfortunately remain prohibitively expensive. The good thing about being the testing ground for the northern hemisphere winter, however, is we get new models before anywhere else. There has been a significant weight reduction in ski equipment in general over the past three years, with manufacturers experimenting with carbon fibre and stronger plastics that can be used thinner. I think we'll look back in 15 years and laugh about skiing on plastic. Skis that are 80 millimetres underfoot are the new narrow, and I ski tour on a width of 109. I enjoy skiing the valley opposite Hotham and at Lake Mountain but the majority of my alpine touring is done in Colorado, where you literally drive to the bottom of a mountain, hike up it, then ski back to the car. When it comes to skins, nylon ones are more durable and grippy on steep slopes but don't glide as well or weigh as little as mohair ones."

snow-ski.com.au

BOGONG

After five relatively good years we were due a below-average season in 2013, and it could have been worse. The mixture of heavy precipitation and above-average temperatures brought on spring-like

Razorback Ridge leading to Mt Feathertop
Photo: Tourism Victoria



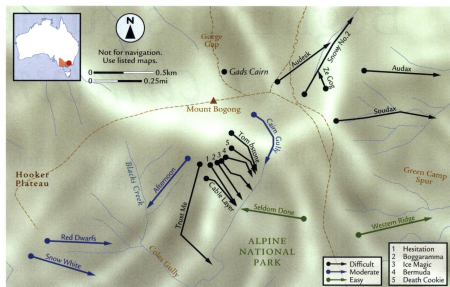
conditions in early August, but I had my heart set on Bogong's hidden blue-ribbon terrain.

Not knowing if there would even be snow, my friend Sara Black and I hit the road in early October with the objective of skiing the east-facing gullies. The leeward aspects of a 2,000-ish-metre peak like Bogong can build up huge snow depths that allow for skiable terrain into October and sometimes November. So one sunny afternoon we hit the track up Staircase Spur (the start of which is easier to park a two-wheel drive at than the shorter Eskdale Spur) and started the long slug to the summit. We intended to ascend about 1,500 metres before reviewing the plan.

In glorious weather, we made it halfway to the summit by sunset and set up camp. The following day, we ascended past the treeline and felt the full force of the October sun. The west-facing terrain held no snow but offered beautiful views to the Main Range and sparkling Murray River.

We reached the summit after lunch and were relieved to see a bunch of nicely angled steep gullies with solid-looking cornices and slush snow. After chatting to a couple of local cross-country skiers about our options, we had a few quick runs in the famous Cairn Gully directly off the summit on the south side.

Later, we walked towards West Peak to check out the views, which revealed short

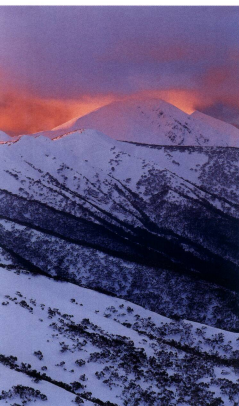


but skiable east-facing gullies holding the remnants of a solid snowpack along the summit ridge to our left. By the time we actually reached the peak, however, the snow had all but disappeared. The views were riveting nonetheless so we spent some time contemplating the town of Mount Beauty directly below and an unfamiliar aspect of Feathertop's north face and Mount McKay.

After a calm night on the summit, we woke to another sunny and hot day. Just after dawn, we strolled to Audax Point and were stoked to see a long valley with a cliff band to our left that had acted as a snow trap. The result was a 35 to

45-degree slope of perfect slush, ending about 400 metres below. I skied down and bootpacked up continuously all morning while Sara took photographs. It was perfect spring skiing conditions, though the adrenaline had been replaced by fatigue by midday. Our objective accomplished, we followed a shorter, recently opened route down Granite Flat Spur to be back in the village for sunset. [W](#)

Sam Leitch learnt to ski in Victoria before sampling the untracked slopes of La Grave in France and Gulmarg in Kashmir. He is an ambassador for Melbourne-based Coalition Brands and can be seen shredding at vimeo.com/49140242.



The writer carving in the corn snow on Bogong in 2013. Photo: Sara Black

Beginner's guide to *ice climbing*

The wild and beautiful sport of ice climbing is easy to fall in love with, according to *Jason Gallate*

Ice climbing is hell, then it's fun, then hell again, and when you finish—it's elation. One second you can be wishing you were any place on Earth except this God-forsaken icy corner, and the next you can't think of anywhere better than your one-foot-wide belay kicked into the snow above a precipitous drop. In other words, it is intoxicating. The sheer exoticness and superhero-quality of the climbing is crazy; you feel like some giant, metallic, praying mantis who can jab his points into any surface and just keep sticking and climbing. The terrain is terrifically varied, and your uninhabited and uninhabited fantasies about mountaintops are made real. Quite often, you are alone in the sublime. Canberra-based climber Sarah Truscott says: "A lot of [my motivation for ice climbing] is the attraction of the unknown, especially living in Australia where winter sports are limited. I'm also attracted for the challenge it presents: taking you out of your comfort zone and pushing you to consider every step, switching on your brain completely." She adds: "Reading stories of trips to far-flung snowy places captured my imagination and now that I have ropes, systems and operating at height relatively down pat, I feel more comfortable about throwing additional stuff like ice conditions and mountain weather systems into the fray."

New Zealand alpinist Diane Drayton climbs ice walls that make me weep my pants to even look at. When a back injury left her left leg partially paralysed about 10 years ago, Drayton opted to pursue more steep climbs than marathon-like mountaineering routes. She now has numerous Hardest New Route and Hardest Repeat Climb awards from the Remarkables Ice & Mixed Festival in her collection.

She says: "One particular thing I love about ice climbing is that it's a beautiful style of climbing. Climbing ice well is all about how you position your body and

being efficient, you get to make placements with your ice tools that give you more control over how you climb than on rock, or mixed, where you have to use what you find [in the way of hand and footholds]. It means that sometimes I can forget that I even have a problem with my leg."

Besides the stripped-back movement, Drayton says the main attractions of ice climbing are the places it takes you to and the sense of community.

STARTING FROM THE BOTTOM

Arguably, the easiest way to get into ice climbing is to befriend a Queenstown ice climber who can show you around the Remarkables, where you can be at some spectacular ice after a 40-minute over-snow walk. While I don't personally know anyone that has started without having climbed rock first, this may be because I live in Australia among world-class rock climbs. Trees can take the place of ice for practising with your



Climbing at Blue Lake
Photo: K7 Adventures

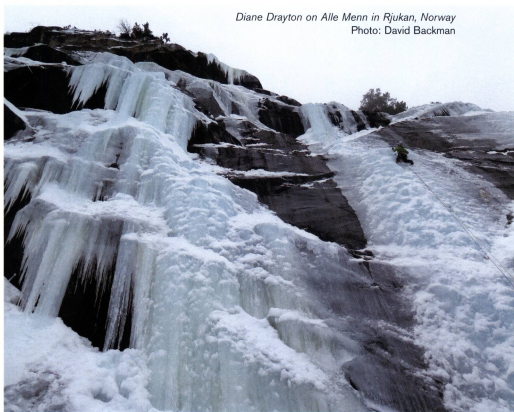
tools, though I do not recommend this, especially after experiencing a hammer to the helmet after my pick pulled out of the wood unexpectedly.

Rock, mixed and ice climbing all rely on the same infrastructure to keep you alive: rope, anchors, harness and belay device. Going from rock to ice simply means changing the protection you use from nuts and cams to ice screws. The advantages of mixed over pure ice climbing are that you can find it everywhere there are mountains and the variation tests your entire range of skills. Switching from hands to axes isn't as complicated as you might think. You stick one axe in and then the other, above your head at roughly the same height, then look down at your feet, stick your bum out to lift one leg out of the ice and kick it in at higher point, then repeat with the second leg to bring your pelvis to the ice. Essentially: stick, stick, kick, kick. When you do it right you feel as if you are standing on the balls of your feet on the rung of a ladder, except instead of a ladder there is just lots of scary ice and tiny metal spikes keeping you from oblivion.

Ice climbing is a gear geek's dream, but it is also fundamentally about making choices and living with those choices. As well as considerations such as how long it has been since the last snowfall, the gear you choose to carry or leave behind has huge implications for survival if things go wrong. While the weight you carry, and therefore your speed, might be the difference between success and failure, stories also abound in which carrying a bivvy or extra fuel could have saved lives or limbs. When it comes to the ice itself, you can see immediately if it's three-feet-thick with good protection or if there is water running underneath, but it takes a journeyman climber to read the subtle features of 'good' and 'bad' ice. The general rule is the colder the ice, the safer, but you need to learn to recognise ice that is remelted or aerated, for example, and be aware of factors such as air temperature. Grading is less precise than for rock in that you have waterfall (W#), mixed (M#) and alpine grades to consider as well as changing conditions through the season. An M3 climb may only be an M1-level snow gully at the start of the winter, for example.

WHERE IN THE SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE?

The area around Blue Lake in Kosciuszko National Park offers some short but enjoyable climbs on a good winter (ice climbing is dangerous if the temperature rises above zero). The trip in is well worth the walk or ski even if there isn't any ice. Canberra-based ice climbing instructor



Diane Drayton on Alle Menn in Rjukan, Norway
Photo: David Backman

JASON'S GEAR CHECKLIST

- **Rope:** I like to climb with half-ropes (ie. two thin ropes at the same time), which is more expensive and slightly heavier than a single one but makes me feel secure. Depending on whether you're happy to use second-hand single ropes or would rather new half ropes you could be looking at anything from \$80 to \$1,000.
- **Ice screws:** Black Diamond's Turbo or Express screws are my preference, though at around \$110 a pop that is a hefty investment if you're using 14 screws for a 40-metre waterfall (three at the base, one every four metres, plus a belay anchor at the top). This could be considered a conservative approach, and you can pick up a second-hand screw for \$30, but it's a personal decision. You can of course save screws by making anchors out of the ice itself, which is nerve-racking but great fun.
- **Axes:** Carbon-fibre leashless models designed for pure vertical climbing retail at around \$500 each, but you wouldn't want to take one up a large mountain as they have no hammer nor adze and can break if swung into rock by mistake. The curved handle and lack of leash on these high-end tools allow you to swap hands the way you can in rock climbing. A pair of Petzl Aztar axes might be old-fashioned and clunky by comparison but serve beginners well

on the mountain and also work on pure ice for a few hundred dollars less.

- **Crampons:** I favour Grivel G12s or Black Diamond Sabretooths for alpine climbing but step into the G14 or Cyborg models when I'm focused on ice, though all of these can handle both. Second-hand crampons are rare but worth grabbing, while a new pair will set you back upward of \$200.
- **Boots:** Probably the most important factor in your enjoyment of the day, the stiffer the baseplate the better for ice climbing but also the more like walking in ski boots they become. It is one thing to wear super-stiff boots for two hours of vertical climbing and another to walk in them for 14 hours up a mountain. My first boots were leather and extremely comfortable to walk in, but barely took a crampon and flexed too much on vertical ice. My second pair was solid plastic, great on ice and \$250 on sale, but left my feet looking like chopped liver whenever I went mountaineering. The likes of La Sportiva's Nepal Evo boots can be a good compromise, but they come with a pricetag of about \$750.

That's just the fundamentals. You will also need gaiters if you don't want to rip your pants up, a harness and belay device, slings, quickdraws, while the list of stuff that sits between 'essential' and 'very useful' is endless.



Gon Nido on the west face
of the Remarkables
Photo: Andrew Finnigan

BASIC ICE CLIMBING TIPS

- 1. Conserve energy:** The biggest mistake of beginners is to kick their fronts points or swing their axe more than once, when usually the first stick is the best. You can tell if a placement is good by the feel and the ping that the metal makes when it hits solid ice. Sometimes re-swinging is inevitable, but doing it just because you don't feel comfortable is a waste of energy.
- 2. Use any and every feature you find in the ice:** If there is a tiny little step, put your foot on it sideways and give your calves a break. If there is a slot to rest your pick in and hang on, use it.
- 3. When placing a screw, do so from a 'rested' position:** Kick a step and get comfortable before starting to stick in a screw. If you are hanging on as tight as a vice and get too scared to finish placing a screw, things can go wrong very quickly.
- 4. Don't fall on lead:** The fall is bad enough, but having sharp metal picks flying around your head, or sticking a front point in unexpectedly on the way down is not a good time.

Ben Lomond in Tasmania can also feature thin streams of waterfall ice that look relatively long and technically challenging, but once you have committed to an airfare the more obvious choice is New Zealand. There is ice just about everywhere on South Island in winter, including thousands of areas that have never been climbed. The convenience of The Remarkables is deserving of special attention, though we are talking a slog up the ski hill and a terrifying traverse around the back of the mountain. The easiest entree into ice climbing is via the ice climbing festival held every August since 2012, which features affordable courses for all abilities. If you simply want to try the isolated experience of vertical ice climbing to see if you like it, Franz Joseph and Fox glaciers provide guided and equipped trips into their crevasses. Upwards from there are all sorts of guided options, but to get to proper 'water ice' still requires some mountaineering skills and effort. [W](#)



k7adventures.com
climbing adventures.com.au
icelandmixedfestival.co.nz
alpineclub.org.nz

Zac Zaharias explains: "You're pretty much guaranteed snow and some ice at Blue Lake between mid-July and early September because it's a few hundred metres above the ski resorts. On the western side there are three buttresses that offer snow climbs of between 45 and 60 degrees—they're not the long and steep climbs of New Zealand but have long been used by Australian mountaineers for practise. Then further round the cirque to the north there are some broken-up crags featuring bluffs of about 10 metres in height that accumulate snowmelt and create falls of seep ice—this is closer to your classic, vertical ice climbing. It's dinner plate ice though, so it's wise to throw in a top rope." According to Zaharias, a mixture of

experienced rock climbers and total beginners looking for a unique backcountry experience sign up for his one- to five-day courses. He adds: "It's rare that we get snow consisting of multiple layers rather than a crust that you can kick through, but some of the gullies in the Main Range that you can ski are also steep enough to be used for snow climbing." Mount Buller, meanwhile, sustains a small but determined crew of alpinists. The routes are better described as small-scale mountaineering with patches of verglassed rock and frozen grass rather than ice climbing, but small frozen waterfalls sometimes feature. These pitches should not be mistaken for easy though, as there is virtually no protection on Buller.

Sydney-based neuroscientist Jason Gallate started rock climbing 20 years ago and bumbled his way into mountaineering, ice and mixed climbing on a kitesurfing trip to New Zealand.

FORBIDDEN COUNTRY

Just returned from hiking in Afghanistan, *Tracey Croke* suggests five testing trips that could help you shed any preconceptions about so-called no-go zones

Visiting and learning about areas that were once considered no-go zones due to conflict, lack of infrastructure or simply misinformation, can often provide a greater sense of escape and rejuvenation than a predictable beach getaway. The new generation of tour operators has recognised that Australian travellers are craving these unconventional, exploratory trips and opening up new horizons around the globe in a responsible way. Below is my top pick of challenging trips that you can fit into your annual leave.

CLIMB THE FORGOTTEN PEAK OF MOUNT HALGURD IN IRAQI KURDISTAN

Kurdistan has been autonomous since 2003 and not suffered the violence experienced by the remainder of Iraq, though Sydney-based mountaineer Ade Summers says it is far from easy to travel through. Earlier this year, he led the first commercial climb up Mount Halgurd, the highest peak in the Zagros Mountains. He explains: "We had a military liaison officer with us so we wouldn't wander into areas with unexploded ordnance on the lower approach."

A close call with an avalanche saw the group break trail in waist-deep snow, before a second slide forced them to abort the climb altogether. Three days later, however, the weather cleared enough for Summers himself to summit.

As if the glitzy capital of Erbil was not surprise enough—in a territory labelled no-go by the Australian government's travel advisory service—the group was overwhelmed at being invited to dine with the president's nephew at a six-star hotel one night. Summers admits: "It was better food than the freeze-dried meals we had on the hill!"

He believes anyone able to trek for multiple days carrying a 20-kilogram pack would enjoy the climb, though you need to be mentally strong to follow a little-known path in somewhere like Kurdistan. "You've got to be able to deal with the unexpected

and have a real sense of adventure," Summers explains.

SCALE GRANITE PEAKS ON THE ISLAND OF SOCOTRA

The Yemen may not be everyone's choice for a stress-busting getaway due to ongoing security issues, including Al'Qaeda attacks, but 380 kilometres off the mainland sits peaceful Socotra Island with its Unesco-listed beaches and the Haghir Mountains. Sometimes referred to as the Galapagos of the Indian Ocean, Socotra is one of the world's most isolated landforms of continental origin and a third of its species are found nowhere else.

ENTER INTO ARNHEM LAND

The Yolngu homelands of north-east Arnhem Land are presumed difficult to access, but with the right permits you can stay with and learn from the people who have cared for this special part of the world for over 40,000 years.

Former Tourism Australia director John Morse, who has been visiting Arnhem Land for many years, says: "It's always been possible to visit Arnhem Land but many people think a special invitation is required;



Kurdistan's Zagros Mountains
Photo: Secret Compass

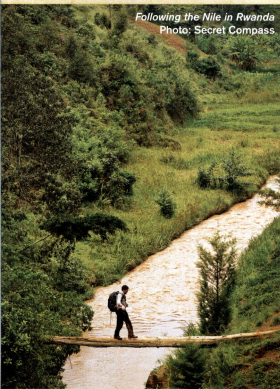
A dragons blood tree on Socotra

Photo: Xavier Aubut





Anhem Land
Photo: Wayne Quilliam



Following the Nile in Rwanda
Photo: Secret Compass

that's not so. There is a real desire by Yolngu people to open their land, homes and share their deep knowledge and exquisite culture with the outside world."

Aboriginal-owned operator Lirrwi Yolngu Tourism has recently launched a seven-day tour that aims to 'earn and learn' from tourism without dominating Yolngu culture. Manager Matt Grooby says: "Nowhere else can you get the same level of connection and understanding with people on their homelands and on their terms."

FOLLOW IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF MARCO POLO ACROSS AFGHANISTAN
Queenslander Campbell Costello is one of a few outsiders to have crossed the Showr Pass in post-conflict Afghanistan as part of a three week expedition in the remote Pamir Mountains.

He says: "I know being in the Wakhan Corridor is very different from other areas in Afghanistan, but not once did I ever feel threatened."

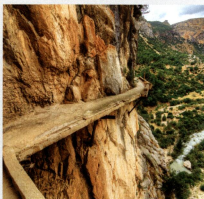
He adds: "From massive mountains that seem to ascend out of nowhere to dry desolate plains that look like something off a George Lucas movie set, the scenery is stunning and the people are possibly the most hospitable I've met on all my travels."

WALK THE NILE IN SOUTH SUDAN
British ex-soldier Levison Wood is currently undertaking a year-long challenge to walk the length of the Nile, and is calling for eight fee-paying walkers to join him and a documentary crew for 10 days in the Nubian Desert in September as a way to raise funds for African wildlife charities Tusk and Space for Giants. The 6,840-kilometre journey, which Wood started last December in the highlands of Rwanda, was deemed politically and medically impossible until now. [W](#)



secretcompass.com
lirritourism.com.au
project-himalaya.com

Trekking in Afghanistan's Pamir Mountains
Photo: Tracey Croke



POPULAR TRAILS THAT PUSH THE BOUNDARIES

- **The frozen Zanskar:** Nepal-based operator Project Himalaya runs a 20-day trip walking the semi-frozen Zanskar (or Chadar) River, where the conditions change hour-by-hour as the water ebbs, flows and freezes.
- **Hua Shan Trail:** China's notorious 120-kilometre trail starting in the old capital of Xi'an features precarious-looking ledges made of a couple of planks hammered together.
- **El Caminito del Rey:** This heart-pumping route (pictured) near Málaga, originally built for hydroelectric plant workers and technically closed since 2000, is currently being restored.
- **Cascade Saddle:** A fixed wire rope was recently proposed for this spectacular two-day alpine crossing in Mount Aspiring National Park due to the number of fatal falls that have occurred on it during wet weather.

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This menu is guaranteed to make mealtimes during a five-day walk a joy rather than a necessity, writes *Andrew Davison*

bushwalk if you use the following shopping list. Creating a set menu might be more complicated than simply throwing some rice and pasta in your pack but it will prevent you carrying too much or too little.

Of course, it's a good idea to plan one or two meals that are simply 'all-in and boil' for evenings of bad weather, and to plan

your menu around eating the heaviest and most perishable items first. It is also sensible to maximise your ingredients across a couple of very different recipes to keep things interesting. The total weight of the menu below (for two eaters with average appetites) is around six kilograms; actually less than the recommended 900 grams of food per person per day.

Breakfast: Cereal and milk powder
Lunch: Cheese, cucumber and dried tomatoes on crackers
Dinner: At the pub en route home



Photos: Andrew Davison



SHOPPING LIST

Fresh ingredients

1 large carrot
 ½ bunch of fresh coriander
 1 ¼ bunches of fresh parsley
 1 small bunch of mint
 ½ cup of lemon juice
 1 large cucumber
 10 cloves of garlic
 1 small onion
 500g of parmesan
 1 dessert spoon of thyme
 Small piece of ginger
 Rind of one lemon, finely grated

Dried ingredients

4 cups (400g) of muesli
 1 ½ cups (160g) of milk powder, extra
 if you like it in hot drinks
 ½ cup (100g) of semolina
 1 cup (70g) of desiccated coconut
 ¾ cup (100g) of cashew nuts
 ¼ cup (50g) of moong dahl
 1 cup (150g) of bulgur
 ½ cup (50g) of peanuts
 4-5 dried figs
 150g of fig paste
 ¾ of a preserved lemon
 20 dried apricots
 15 dried apple rings
 5 dried pears
 ½ cup (100g) of sultanas
 ½ cup of mixed dried fruits

20 dried tomatoes in oil
 45g tin of anchovies
 ¼ cup (60g) of pine nuts
 250g pasta
 1 cup (100g) of coconut milk powder
 ¼ cup (25g) of dried green beans
 ½ cup (50g) of dried shrimps
 1 cup (80g) of dried mushrooms
 2 ½ cups of rice
 2 whole dried bananas (optional)
 ¼ cup (20g) of instant potato mash
 ½ cup of red wine (whole bottle optional)
 Crackers (x 2 meals)

From the pantry

Salt and pepper
 ¾ cup (150g) of sugar, extra if you like
 it in hot drinks
 ¼ cup of oil
 3 teaspoons of cumin seeds
 2 teaspoons of ground cumin
 2 teaspoons of ground coriander
 ½ teaspoon of turmeric powder
 2 teaspoons of mustard seeds
 5 cloves
 5 cardamom pods
 1 cinnamon stick
 7 dried chillies
 2 dessert spoons of corn flour
 2 dessert spoons of self-raising flour

Plus: Tea, coffee, scroggin and extra snacks
 (though any excess dried fruits and nuts may
 take care of this)

CUCUMBER CURRY (pictured)

Serves 2

½ large cucumber
 1 dried red chilli
 1 teaspoon of cumin seeds
 1 teaspoon of mustard seeds
 2 garlic cloves
 ½ cup of coconut milk powder
 ½ teaspoon of turmeric powder
 ¼ teaspoon of salt
 ½ cup of peanuts (roughly chopped)
 1 teaspoon of sugar
 1 dessert spoon of oil

AT HOME

Cucumbers keep fresh for at least a week
 in the right conditions and can make for
 a refreshing lunch. Pack chillies, cumin
 seeds and mustard seeds together in a
 small container. Pack all other ingredients
 together in a plastic bag, excluding oil.

IN THE FIELD

Cut cucumbers into bitesize pieces and
 chop the garlic finely. Place the oil in a
 pot and then fry chilli, cumin seeds and
 mustard seeds until seeds begin to pop.
 Now quickly add a cup of water followed
 by all other ingredients and bring to the
 boil. Simmer for five minutes, stirring
 occasionally, then serve sprinkled with
 nuts over rice.

Insulated jackets

Wild's lads and ladies try a selection of down and synthetic puffer jackets on for size



1. Mountain Designs Pro Elite Aurora 11 Sweater | \$400 | mountaindesigns.com
From the chunky two-way zip with glove-friendly toggle to the fully tricot-lined pockets, this jacket means business; Himalayan-level business. The 800-loft goose down fill (280g, only 10% feather), plus a generous synthetic-fill draught tube under the main zip, made me feel like I was wearing half a sleeping bag, making it best suited to Tasmanian tops or international peak-bagging trips. Though rain didn't bead the same way as on shinier models, it took longer for a downpour to soak through the Gore-Tex Windstopper Active outer to the filling and make the jacket feel heavy and cool. With two mesh drop pockets for warming up your camera or water bottle and a generous chest pocket, this hoodless model also compresses (with some aggressive wrestling) into its own pocket despite weighing around 980g. Sweating was an issue in the Victorian high country so the two-way zip came in handy for venting, but for a classic, big-mountain jacket for the depths of winter this is hard to beat (and I recently saw it on sale).

2. Lowe Alpine Women's Lhasa | \$269 | intertrek.com.au

This 650-loft duck down jacket with textured nylon shell and poppered hood was one of the most versatile tested in terms of its rain resistance, low-profile fit and average warmth-to-weight ratio. At around 490g, true to size and with a drawcorded drop-tail hem, this warmed me quickly and stayed hugging my hips under an overnight pack. Lowe Alpine's hydrophobic finish is said to slow

the uptake of water to around half the usual rate of down, and heavy rain did seem to take longer to permeate the sewn-through chambers than on the Bonney and Reactor. The puffy hood is easy to customise with multiple drawcords and wire, but could do with coming a little lower down the forehead. I appreciated the collar's tricot lining, which continues under your chin, and the seams look like they would hold up under stress. I do worry about the lining being so thin as to show the feathers though. I would have appreciated some venting under the arm as it reaches right into your pits, while there's just a flap under the zip where others tested have a draught tube. The single internal pocket is big enough for a phone or muesli bar, but otherwise we're talking minimalist design. The lycra inner cuffs stretched over time a bit too far down my hand, and then got wet and muddy in camp, but the thin Velcro-fastened outer cuff blocked out the wind best of all the women's jackets. This packs down to about the same size as the Reactor, while the higher (20%) proportion of feather in the filling suggests it might flatten more over time.

3. Gondwana Men's Gairdner Eco Down | \$170 | gondwanaoutdoor.com.au

At just over six feet tall, I found the Large model a tad short, and confess the neon orange lining was a bit of a turn-off (though the coloured zip pulls are a nice touch). This is much less puffy than the Virtuoso and Aurora, owing to its recycled polyester microfibre fill, so it's a shame the cuffs aren't more wind-blocking. The chest pocket is a bit too high for my liking but the drawcord hem

is quick to operate. I would have liked more stretch at the underarms and shoulders but couldn't fault the nylon outer for the price. The outside pockets aren't lined but there's a useful inside zip pocket for things like coins or passport. The main zip is two-way but not especially water- or wind-proof, and the lining was not as soft on the skin as in the Virtuoso. Handy for travelling if you'd rather steer clear of water-hating down and not too warm for the east coast.

4. Mountain Designs Women's Reactor 14 | \$200 | mountaindesigns.com

This midweight (150g of 600-loft duck down, 10% feather) jacket with polyester shell feels a bit thicker than the Bonney but features a synthetic-insulated draught tube behind the main zip for extra protection. The zips are the hidden-teeth type rather than the waterproof-tape type but the pocket ones are protected from the rain by mini storm flaps. It took a while to get used to the two-way zip (to not feel like I was going to break it) but I loved the contrasting-colour rubber zip pulls, and the slightly chunkier drawcord toggles than found on the Lhasa were easy to adjust on the move. I fear the tiny bit of Velcro on the non-elasticated cuffs would fail sooner rather than later, but the internal stuff pocket is a big plus. A tad more boxy in shape than others tested, and a bit tighter round the chin, I nevertheless fit a rain layer over the top and the hem is a good length. The on-trend colour might be considered a bonus, and I was impressed how well the matte outer glided through prickly scrub. For dry, windy days in the Victorian alps, this is a toasty option.



5. Gondwana Women's Bonney | \$180
gondwanaoutdoor.com.au

This urban-style parka complete with popped faux fur-trimmed hood is not for everyone, but its promise of 100% recycled synthetic fill caught my attention. Though the flattish foam-like filling was not as warm, nor compressible, as I hoped for its 790g, the jacket's nylon outer did block the wind effectively on the Great Ocean Walk. The basic construction, including some fraying and exposed bobbin thread on the outside, meant I could feel cold spots soon after we stopped moving however. The handwarmer pockets are nice and deep but could do with some fleece, and I worry about the durability of the elastic strips that stand in for cuffs. While the Reactor is a far superior active jacket for the price, this is an attractive and responsible choice if you prefer a long cut for walks close to home. Birdwatchers might not like the rustling though.

6. Kathmandu Women's XT DriFill | \$700
kathmandu.com.au

This all-singing all-dancing 750-loft goose down jacket incorporating Pertex Shield waterproofing and NGX²-laminated shell is longer fitting and box-baffled for those looking to shred pow in Japan or hang around high-altitude basecamps. The much-vaunted DriFill did retain its puffiness and thus warmth better than the other women's jackets tested, but not quite enough to rule out factors such as the differences between duck/goose and fill weights in general. Unsurprisingly for a weight of just under a kilogram, you're

wearing a fair amount of features (big zip loops, chunky toggles, two Napoleon pockets, down-filled inner collar, wide storm flaps etc), which are all handy if you're riding chairlifts or bunkering down but not so fun when snagging on vegetation or counting grams. The stuff sack is twice as big as the Reactor's, making for a decent pillow if it was fleecy, while the slanted cuffs provide extra protection when not wearing gloves. The fixed, helmet-friendly hood (with nifty little tightening toggles) was one of the warmest tested, and I appreciated the tricot-covered zip garage, but in extreme cold I'd still opt for the puffer, unisex Aurora Sweater.

7. The North Face Men's Thunder Micro | \$380 | thenorthface.com.au

I instantly loved the sleek design of this commuter-style matte jacket, but less so the pricetag, until I realised the 800-loft goose down inside the 'micro' baffles incorporates a new Teflon-based water-shedding treatment known as ProDown. In addition to packing easily into its own pocket and weighing only 350g, this ultralight model kept me warmer than I expected when drenched because it did not flatten completely and then dried quickly. It's not nearly as rain- or wind-blocking as the other men's jackets tested (including the shiny, similar-priced Virtuoso), but the warmth-to-weight ratio is still impressive with features like internally elasticated cuffs. The snug fit limited snares on the 20D ripstop nylon outer while scrambling, and everyone

appreciated my being able to spot clean the wicking armpit panels. The vertical baffles on the shoulder, and the drawcord hem being inside the pockets, make for an urban look but I'd have no issues trusting this as a mid-layer in the snowfields.

8. Outdoor Research Men's Virtuoso Hoody | \$389 | intertrek.com.au

Featuring a shell that's 20D nylon on the body and 30D nylon with an air-permeable DWR on the sleeves and shoulders, this is a lightweight but versatile jacket. It offers good mobility through the shoulders and hips (with a two-way zip), and compacts very small into its own tricot-lined pocket for use as a pillow. The shiny outer sheds drizzle and light snow well, while the taffeta lining feels a bit sturdier than others tested. I appreciated the inside drop pocket and rated this the second warmest men's jacket tested. The 650-loft goose down fill (20% feather, 240g) was plenty warm over a thin base layer in June in the high country, and the drop-tail hem provided good protection from the cold air. The fill is distributed wider across the back to avoid overheating under a pack, though sweat did build up here and the back of my neck eventually, while the fairly boxy fit allows for deep handwarmer pockets (enough for a beanie, buff, skins etc). The zip was sticky at first (you have to thread it quite deep) so would be tricky with ski gloves on, but I liked the flattish drawcord toggles. The compressibility means you can afford to carry this as a spare for cold nights and the hood fits over a helmet comfortably.

The Grampians

Bruce and Alistair Paton detail five weekend walks in Grampians-Gariwerd National Park



*Alistair on the summit of Mt Difficult
Photos: Bruce and Alistair Paton*

There's something special about having a place that's close enough to a major city that you can drive there on a Friday night, disappear into the wilderness for the weekend and be back for work (or school, or uni, or scones, depending on your point of view) on Monday.

Grampians-Gariwerd in western Victoria is one such area. Well known as an outstanding day walk destination, the rugged sandstone ranges also offer fantastic remote trekking opportunities. The proximity of roads and towns makes it hard to avoid all traces of civilisation for weeks at a time, but it's hard to imagine anywhere offering a better selection of overnight hikes—from a perfect beginner trek on well-formed

tracks in the Wonderland Range to expeditions that require serious route-finding and rock-scrambling skills. Plus, there are loads of campsites that feel a million miles from the modern world.

One unfortunate downside of this spectacular landscape is its friendliness to fire, and another large bushfire ravaged the park in January. Starting near Troopers Creek campsite—the starting point for the wonderful Mount Gar (Mount Difficult) traverse—it burnt most of that range and large tracts surrounding it. Though originally listed here, the Mount Gar trek will be closed for up to a year and may have to be completely rebuilt. Some of the other walks included have also been affected by fire but national park staff

and volunteers have done a mountain of work to make them accessible again. The views may not be as lush as they were when we visited, but this is a great time to witness the regeneration of the forest up close. Also worth noting is the Grampians Peaks Trail, which will one day be a 12-day traverse from Mount Zero at the park's northern end all the way to its southern tip at Mount Abrupt 144 kilometres away. Section one, from Halls Gap to Borough Huts, is scheduled to open in 2015. Much of the track construction work has already been done, with the biggest remaining task a 24-person capacity campsite at Mount Rosea. The following walks are listed from easiest to most challenging.

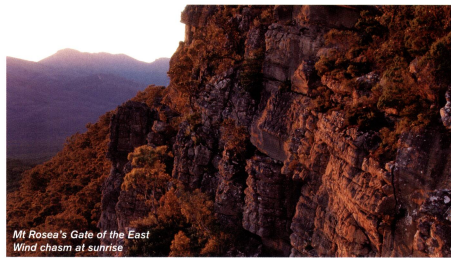
If you are into wildflowers then the Grampians is definitely the place for you – in spring the forests and heathlands are alive with blossoms belonging to more than 1,000 species. This is also a great place to view the astonishing diversity of habitats that eucalypts have managed to adapt to, from dry woodlands in the north to wet sclerophyll forest in the deep gullies and sub-alpine heath on the exposed mountaintops. Between September and December, the hikes through Djibalara and Wonderland are the best long-distance walks for a wildflower experience. Kangaroos, wallabies, koalas and echidnas are regularly spotted by walkers along with some of the 250-plus species of birds that call the park home. If you are travelling with friends from overseas, make sure you take them to the grassy areas around Halls Gap, which are home to some very reliable mobs of kangaroos.

The park is just off the Western Highway, 250 kilometres (about three and a half hours' drive) from Melbourne and 500 kilometres from Adelaide. The main access towns are Ararat and Stawell to the east, Horsham to the north and Hamilton to the south. There is a daily bus service from Stawell to Halls Gap in the heart of the park.

See parkweb.vic.gov.au/explore/parks/grampians-national-park or call 13 61 96 for more information.

Summers are warm and dry, usually with clear skies, but heat and lack of water can make walking challenging and the park has been hit twice in recent years by serious bushfires. Autumn and spring are the best times to visit.

Halls Gap is the main tourist centre of the park, located beneath the cliffs of the Wonderland Range. This thriving tourist town has caravan parks, hotels, hostels, motels and guesthouses. You can also stay in Dunkeld at the southern end of the park or Barrigar (Roses) Gap to the north, while the town of Stawell is a 30-minute drive to the east. There are 13 vehicle-based campsites



*Alistair on the rock slabs
opposite Briggs Bluff*



throughout the park with fireplaces and picnic tables. Walk-in campsites in the Mount Gar Range and the Major Mitchell Plateau have limited space and require you to book ahead—check with the rangers for more information.

TRACKS

Tracks run the gamut from well-graded and relatively easy strolls in the Wonderland Range to treks requiring off-track navigation in the more remote parts of the Victoria and Djibilara ranges. Often you will find yourself scrambling over rocks with only the occasional arrow to guide you.

WARNINGS

Extreme care is required on the many tracks that are near cliffs; people have fallen and died on some of the popular trails. The weather can also change suddenly—be sure to check fire ratings and remember snow can hit the higher peaks. Water is not available on most overnight trips so be prepared to carry all you need. There are several species of venomous snake in the park, while feeding other native animals is ill-advised as it can be harmful for them to become dependent on people.

MAPS

Spatial Vision's northern and southern Grampians maps cover all the walks listed here (and many others), but be aware they were printed before the track to Mount Rosea was realigned. This is not a big problem since the new track is easy to follow. Before leaving, drop into the Brambuk cultural centre south of Halls Gap where the

staff can fill you in on the latest track conditions and have you fill in a trip intentions form. We also recommend buying a copy of *Discovering Grampians—Gariwerd: A Visitors Guide to Grampians National Park*, then again, we did write it.

THE WALKS

1. WONDERLAND TRAVERSE (See previous page for map)

This trek leads you through the most visited part of the park, but it's popular for a reason. The tracks are easy to follow and the scenery is outstanding and varied. This is a long walk so start early.

Day 1: Halls Gap tennis courts to Borough Huts (20km, 9hrs)

From the tennis courts in the north-west corner of Halls Gap Caravan Park, follow the track along Stony Creek to Venus Baths, a series of picturesque rockpools. This area was heavily affected by flooding in 2011, and the rangers have put a lot of effort into restoring the track. Continue along the creek, crossing it on bridges below two small waterfalls (Splitters Falls and Stony Falls) then take a sharp left at Wonderland Carpark, following the signs into the Grand Canyon. The title is a little ambitious but the walking is excellent, with cliffs rising 20 metres on either side of the track as it rock-hops along the base of the canyon before exiting via a steel ladder. From here follow the arrows on the rocks and a short section of track, then pass through Silent Street, a 10 metre-deep crevasse in the sandstone, and make your way to the Pinnacle. The protruding slab

of rock at the crest of the range has great views of the surrounding cliffs and the town of Halls Gap, and is one of the most popular sites in the park.

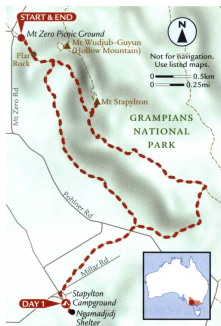
From the Pinnacle continue south along the cliff rim, ignoring two tracks to the right—the first to the garden of the Grampians and the second to Sundial carpark. After visiting Lakeview Lookout the main track heads back to the carpark, where there are toilets, picnic tables and a water tank (it's a good idea to take some purification tablets with you). From here follow the signs to Sundial Peak for one of the best views from the range; it's about a four-kilometre return trip so this section can be skipped if you're pushed for time. Return to the carpark and take the track that leads south-west through forest to cross the road and meet another carpark at the start of the track to Mount Rosea. This track has been realigned in recent years and is now a little longer but a lot easier. It begins with a steady climb through stringybark forest before reaching more exposed rocky areas—follow cairns between rock chimneys, giant boulders and grass trees. After crossing a wide gully the track climbs with great views to the west (the small odd-shaped peak in the middle distance is Tower Hill). Watch for rock cairns and painted arrows as the path leads out before reaching the rim of Mount Rosea's huge east-facing cliffs. Exciting walking follows as the track heads over a narrow fissure known as the Gate of the East Wind on a small metal bridge, then through a cave, before a short climb to reach a junction 100 metres from the summit. Drop packs here and follow the short side trip to the top and drink in the views, mostly back over the ground you have covered and the mountains beyond.

The track continues south from the junction close to the cliff rim before dropping over on a steep descent under Dalton Peaks (Gurdgaragurd). Then it's a four-kilometre walk through forest to the drive-in campsite at Borough Huts, which has room for 15 tents on a large grassy area beside Fyans Creek.

Day 2: Borough Huts to Halls Gap (11km, 4-5hrs)

From the campground walk north on the roadside for about 500 metres, then follow the vehicle track that heads off to the right, leading north-east. This is the Bellfield Track and it follows the eastern shore of Lake Bellfield before joining the Terraces Fireline. After a short, sharp climb below a knoll known as The Grand Old Man the track continues north, passing the dam wall and Little Joe Hill. A short distance further,

a track joins from the left that leads to Brambuk the National Park and Cultural Centre. The Halls Gap township is another two kilometres to the north; pass a turnoff on the right to Boronia Peak and continue past the town to Delleys Bridge, where the track doubles back and enters Halls Gap from the north. Cross the road to return to the tennis courts.



2. MOUNT STAPYLTON CIRCUIT

The northern tip of Grampians-Gariwerd has its own distinct character, with peaks and rock outcrops surrounded by orange cliffs and, beyond, the vast plains of the Wimmera. This return walk can be completed in a day but doing it in two gives you more time to explore and soak in the wild atmosphere. This walk was affected by the recent fire so you will see some burnt-out sections.

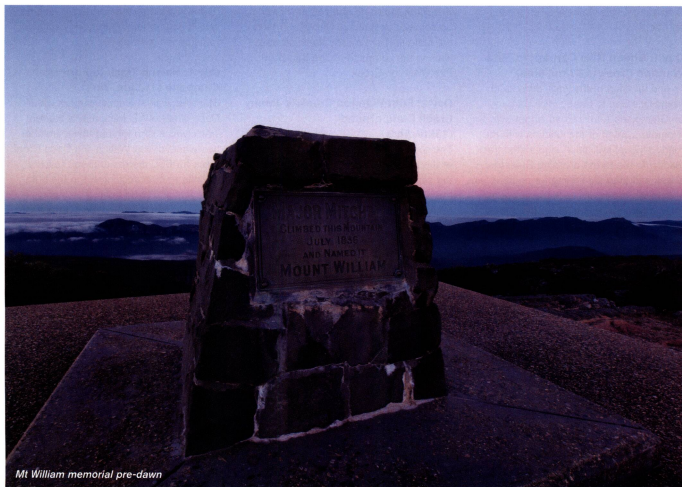
Day 1: Mount Zero Picnic Area to Mount Stapylton Campground (8.5km, 4hrs)

From the picnic area on Mount Zero Road follow the walking track to Mount Stapylton, which immediately begins climbing the steep northern face of the impressive (if inaccurately named) Flat Rock. Ten minutes of strenuous climbing leads to the top of the rock and a spectacular vista—before you is the natural amphitheatre of Mount Stapylton while in the background the ranges wind away to the cliffs of Briggs Bluff, Mount Gar and the rest of Grampians-Gariwerd. Follow painted arrows over the rock and into the amphitheatre, ignoring the sidetrack that joins from the right (this will be your return route the next day). The track passes beneath the massive

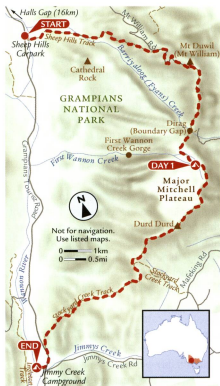
overhanging cliffs then climbs again up a rock ramp, past Bird Rock, to a rocky saddle and a track junction. Leave your packs here for the side trip to Mount Stapylton, which follows the base of more cliffs and then crosses a rocky gully before ascending a broad rocky ledge. Take extreme care in this very exposed area and follow the signs. Return to your packs and continue south along the range, as the track passes through small rocky gorges and valleys. Eventually it levels off, passing through forest dotted by rock outcrops to reach another junction. Take the track to the right that descends from the range and meets another track junction. Turn left (west) and cross Pohlner Road, then continue through the forest for 1.4 kilometres to Stapylton Campground, which is shared with car campers.

Day 2: Mount Stapylton Campground to Mount Zero Picnic Area (5km, 2hrs)

Start the day with a visit to Ngamadidj Shelter, an Aboriginal rock art site a short walk from the campsite. Then retrace your steps past Pohlner Road, turning left at the junction and following the track through dry forest to the base of Flat Rock, where it meets the track from the first day. Turn left and climb to the high point of Flat Rock before a long descent to the picnic area.



Mt William memorial pre-dawn



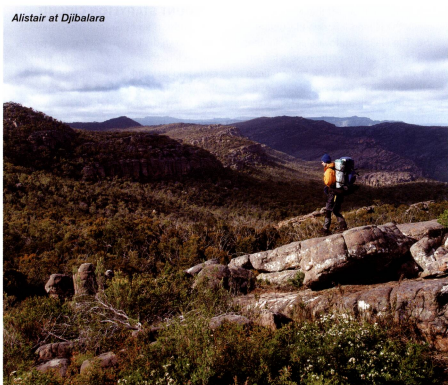
3. MAJOR MITCHELL PLATEAU

Mount William (Mount Duwii) and the Major Mitchell Plateau are the highest points in western Victoria, with all that implies: a wild and remote landscape with sweeping views of the surrounding country, including almost all of the Grampians. This walk requires a car shuttle.

Day 1: Sheep Hills Carpark to First Wannon Creek (12.7km, 5hrs)

To find the start of the walk, drive south from Halls Gap to Sheep Hills Carpark on Grampians Tourist Road, about two kilometres south of the junction with the road to Mount William. A signposted track leads into the forest, crossing Grasree Creek and then continuing for another two kilometres to Fyans Creek (Barri yalug), after which it begins to climb the flanks of the mountain. At 1,167 metres Mount William is the highest peak in the Grampians so it is a long walk, but the track is well graded and the views of Cathedral Rock, a rocky peak rising from the valley, make for a fine distraction. There is a good spot for a break about two hours in on some rock outcrops above a small gorge. After 5.7 kilometres of walking the track joins Mount William Road and follows it to the summit. The first 350 metres is open to cars, but the final 1.8 kilometres is reserved for walkers. The climb is unrelenting but the view from the top is magnificent and encompasses most of the park. After a well-earned break, head back down the road for 100 metres and take

Alistair at Djibalara



a management vehicle track that leads to a communications tower. From here the track plunges steeply into and then out of Boundary Gap (Dirag), which separates Mount William from Major Mitchell Plateau; the final section involves rock scrambling—keep an eye out for the cairns that mark the route and you may need to do some pack-hauling. Once you reach the plateau it is a mostly flat kilometre walk to the campsite on the banks of First Wannon Creek.

Day 2: First Wannon Creek to Jimmy Creek Campground (13km, 5hrs)

The second day begins with a traverse of the plateau, with occasional views of the serrated profile of the Serra Range to the west and the plains of the Wimmera to the east. The track hits the edge of the plateau, marked by a large cairn, 5.2 kilometres from camp. From here it descends steeply and follows a narrow ridge through wet forest to a minor unnamed peak 1.3 kilometres from the plateau rim—a short sidetrack leads to the summit. The track then drops sharply to a junction with Stockyard Creek 4WD track, which is surrounded by a grassy clearing that makes for a good lunch spot. Follow Stockyard Creek Track west and then south, ignoring a sidetrack that joins from the left, to a rocky knoll. After this point you are back on a walking track again; it continues downhill, offering more fine views of the surrounding mountains until you reach the road 5.3 kilometres from

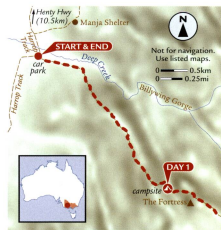
the Stockyard Creek junction. Jimmy Creek Campground is 300 metres to the south along Grampians Tourist Road.

4. THE FORTRESS

An aptly named sandstone massif that dominates the landscape of the Victoria (Billawin) Range, the Fortress is located in wild and remote country only suitable for experienced walkers.

Day 1: Harrop Track to Fortress Campsite (11.5km, 7hrs)

Start the walk at a small carpark where Deep Creek 4WD track meets Harrop Track, which is rough but traversable for two-wheel drives. Walk along Deep Creek Track for 600 metres until you reach a walking track branching off to the right. Take this and head uphill. The track is quite a slog but some interesting overhanging rock formations and caves make for a nice rest spot on the way up.



At the top of the slope the track levels off and you find yourself traversing a ridgeline with good views of the huge sandstone massifs scattered throughout the range. After about a kilometre, the track passes a large rock outcrop with a spectacular view of the most impressive of these massifs, the Fortress itself.

The track descends steeply into a rocky valley, then crosses a small seasonal creek before following it upstream to some large rock overhangs, where you can camp.

Technically you don't need a tent as the overhang provides ample shelter, but it is advisable to take one as a precaution.

Continue up the creek without packs and follow the track up a crevasse directly under the Fortress. The massif itself is impossible to climb without rock-climbing equipment but the surrounding country is well worth exploring. Take care, as there are many cliffs and crevasses in the area.

The track continues on to another walkers' campsite (and, if you were to continue on, a 4WD track) but once you reach this point the best of the scenery is behind you so return to camp for the night.

Day 2: Fortress Campsite to Harrop Track (4.5km, 2hrs)

On the second day return to Harrop Track—the route is quite indistinct and there are false tracks so take care following the arrows on the rocks.

5. THE ASSES EARS (DIJBALARA)

Located in the north-west part of the Grampians, Djibalara is the wildest and least visited range in the national park.



As such, it makes for exciting walking—the route described here requires experience in off-track navigation. This area was severely affected by the recent bushfires and, though it is open for visitors, much of the forest is completely burnt.

Day 1: Rose Creek Road to Djibalara summit (6km, 3.5hrs)

To access Djibalara take the Mount Victoria Road from Halls Gap, turning left on to Rose Creek Road about three kilometres past the turnoff to Reed Lookout. After four kilometres Wallaby Rocks Track joins to the right. Leave your car near the wide junction and head up Wallaby Rocks Track on foot (four-wheel and sturdy two-wheel drives with good clearance can continue from this point with care). Follow the track as it climbs through stringybark forest; in spring this area is filled with colourful wildflowers. About 3.5 kilometres from Rose Creek Road an easily missed walking track joins from the right, opposite a roadside pull-off

area. The track winds through the forest for a kilometre before opening up, with rocks offering views to the east of the jagged Serra Range and in the distance Mount William and the Major Mitchell Plateau—the radio tower on the summit of William is visible on a clear day.

These views are soon surpassed as the track climbs on to rock slabs that overlook the southern portion of Djibalara, which consists of rocky ridges topped by cliffs interspersed with sandstone massifs.

Moments later these are topped again by your first view of the summit from a large overhanging rock that makes for a good spot for a snack. It takes about 45 minutes to reach this location from the 4WD track.

The track then descends steeply to the base of the cliffs you were just perched on, and winds through forest before meeting some large rock outcrops. Until now you have been following a clear path, but from here it is tougher going. The track gradually peters out as you head north-west (if in doubt keep the rocks to your right). You will find yourself swinging around the base of some low cliffs; find a good spot to scramble on to the rocks and follow the sloping rock platform uphill as it becomes a broad ledge between cliffs to your right and left. When you get to the top hop off to the left (this may take a bit of exploring). There are a number of rough sites where you can pitch a tent in the scrub between the rocks. After pitching, it is time to make for the summit. This adventurous section requires you to traverse some seriously rugged terrain, scrambling between, over and occasionally under giant boulders and scrub-filled gullies until you reach the cliff rim. The 710-metre summit is marked by a small cairn. Allow an hour for the return trip to the top and take note of your route so you can find your way back to camp.

Day 2: Djibalara to Rose Creek Road (6km, 3.5hrs)

Retrace your route from day one, taking care to relocate the track as you leave the rock slabs.





THE MAN FROM COXS RIVER

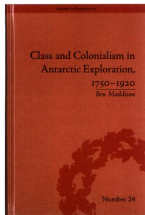
Dir. Russell Kilbey (Empress Arts, themanfromcoxriver.com, due on DVD in September)

Filmed largely on horseback between 2009 and 2011, this affecting documentary about the fading figure of the Anglo-Australian bushman raises interesting questions about the ways we connect with country and the future of wilderness management. As we follow Luke Carlton through the rugged Burrigorang Valley where his ancestors settled in the 1820s and along a foot track to the dusty plateau honouring his grandfather, it's unnervingly easy to resent the wilderness and water catchment protection orders that snuffed out his family's horseback trekking business in 1987, and with it his sense of identity. But when a park ranger calls on Carlton to help move 80 feral horses out of the area, which is inaccessible by truck, we see that the perceived differences between headline environmentalists and those who work the land are one small part of a much bigger debate about the greater good for the bush. Featuring archive photographs and footage harking back to the—perhaps ironic—birth of the Australian conservation movement on Carlton property, in addition to thrilling footage of the stockmen fighting against the instincts of the brumbies in order to save them from an aerial cull, this film is a must-watch for anyone interested in the oral history of the Blue Mountains or park management. It is also filled with droll humour and guaranteed to generate emotion as the 'two-years-later' montage rolls.

CLASS AND COLONIALISM IN ANTARCTIC EXPLORATION, 1750-1920

By Ben Maddison (Pickering & Chatto UK, around \$105)

In a revelatory read for armchair explorers, University of Wollongong professor Ben Maddison zooms in on the 'krill in the food chain of Antarctic discovery' largely erased from history because of the class inequality at the heart of the imperial race. By comparing the records of jobbing seamen, cooks and engineers with official ones, he deconstructs the notion of heroic individualism while also exposing the violence underlying the resupply chain for expeditions. Rather than a series of 'orgasmic' revelations and accolades for officers, we come to see the drawing of the map more as an accumulation of first steps by apprentices. The work of sealers in charting the frozen continent is elevated, as we discover Shackleton was not the first to tackle a treacherous South Georgia crossing and that science played second fiddle to the fur trade. Maddison consults a vast range of sources to show why patriotic duty and the pursuit of the sublime were far from the minds of working-class sailors, who found themselves turned into farmers and sled-menders on the ice, had their diaries confiscated and could barely be enticed aboard by the promise of eight times normal pay. He also explains why 1908 was more significant than reaching the pole.



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For more information, contact Gayle Shapcott via email at gayle.shapcott@primerecreative.com.au or telephone 03 9690 8766

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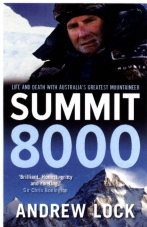
Wild back issues # 32 - 75 in good condition, \$4.00/issue plus P&P 0755454804 or ianbuckberry@bigpond.com.

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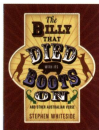
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SUMMIT 8000

By Andrew Lock (Victory Books, \$29.99)



The candid memoir of Australia's most successful high-altitude mountaineer blows your mind, places you on the avalanche-prone face of an 8,000-metre peak and leaves you shivering with the knowledge of just how unrelenting the mountains are. After a cinematic opening that hurls you into his tragedy-stricken 1993 attempt on K2, Lock races back through his early years to help explain what makes a lad from the Sydney suburbs risk death, bankruptcy and permanent singledom to spend much of his time alone inside a frozen tent. The chapters whiz through his 14 summits as you race to read about the next near-miss, but also up between climbers or sweet victory, though each one finishes with a rollecall of friends lost to the mountains. Lock's skill here is that even as we read about being buried by avalanches, falling through cornices, glissading in complete darkness and bivouacking at insane altitudes (not to mention the cerebral oedema and general backstabbing), we understand his love for the challenge and the community. He does not shy away from showing the seedier and more mundane aspects of expeditioning, but also evokes the spirituality and sanctity of the Himalaya through his life-saving inner voice. As the author questions how others can be content to 'claim' a summit without breaking the trail themselves, and hints at unfinished business with Everest, it is uplifting—for this reader at least—to think that a slideshow about a *Wild*-sponsored expedition inspired someone to reach such heights.

**THE BILLY THAT DIED WITH ITS BOOTS**

ON By Stephen Whiteside (Walker Books, \$19.95)

In his delightful, CJ Dennis-inspired collection for Grade 4s and above, Whiteside uses snappy rhyme and rhythm to help Australian children learn about and get excited by the wildlife and landscapes around them. With catchy verses like: 'The tiger droll / is rather droll / or so it seems to me / he has no stripes / not any types / it's odd you must agree' as well as longer, nuanced poems telling of Ned Kelly's boyhood and Antarctic exploration, this is a nostalgic and multi-layered bedtime book.

**FINDING AUSTRALIAN BIRDS**

By Tim Doby and Rohan Clarke (Csiro, \$49.95)

This comprehensive field guide covers over 400 birdwatching sites around the country, including tips for non-birding family members. Rather than illustrations of the 900 or so species, the 600-page text offers up detailed notes on vantage points and access, worthwhile walking tracks and boat trips, plus tips such as 'concentrate your search in the larger clumps of lignum' (for the grass greywren). Maps depicting campsites and likely species, and a short list of useful contacts, make this a worthwhile addition to your trip-planning ritual.

essential instruction and information that no walker should be without. *WildGUIDES* are priced at \$8.20 each, individual Track Notes are \$5.99 each. Contact our online index at wild.com.au to establish your requirements and order online or by phone on 03 9690 8766.

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Blast from the past

'Naked but for a pair of socks and sand-shoes, I jogged down towards the Coxs River.'



THE FILM REVIEWED for this issue reminded us of an article in issue 76 about a solo walk in the Wild Dog Mountains, inspired by a relationship break-up. In the feature, Brian Hawkins describes following the 'soft sigh of the Coxs River', heading up the steep surrounding slopes and down to the 'secret, secret places.... dark, mysterious, peaceful'. He also describes some tough pack-hauling,

exhaustion to the point he would happily exchange '10 fine views for a cup of tea' and sweating so much he opts to discard all except a thermal top draped over his hipbelt like 'a dignified and decorative loincloth'. The same rugged and soul-feeding country is captured through very different eyes in *The Man from Coxs River*.

WHOSE AD IS IT ANYWAY?

Answer in the next issue

Last issue:
Nikwax



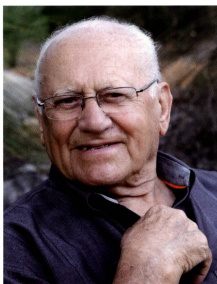
Richard Woldendorp tells *Wild* about photographing Australia's wide open spaces from the air long before Google Earth

I grew up in a country town called Borculo in the Netherlands and spent a lot of time outdoors, up to the start of the second world war. I joined the army after the war and finished up in the Dutch forces in Indonesia. When I returned in 1950, the Australian government was offering free passage to ex-military men so I migrated to Perth in the December. I'd always been interested in landscape painting, but started a housepainting business to earn a living. One of my first clients was MacRobertson Miller Airlines and I'll always remember flying to Derby in an old, unpressurised DC3 Dakota to repaint an outlying facility. It took all day at around 10,000 feet to reach our destination and I was interested in the patterns you can see in the Australian landscape from the air.

After some time I bought my first camera and joined the Cottesloe Camera Club. It was fantastic experience to be confronted with the many possibilities of recording the landscape and environment. There were no official courses at that time but I learnt a lot from people in the club. As I transitioned to professional photography I decided it was important stay freelance to be able to travel to any location at any time. I'm 87 now and can honestly say I've never 'worked' a day in my life.

Trying to capture every aspect of the big and diverse Australian landscape—not necessarily beauty, but natural identity—has become my life's work. I believe my latest book *Out of the Blue*, which took seven years to compile, is my biggest and best. I recently holidayed in New Zealand but felt little need to photograph it; there are already so many good photos taken from its mountaintops.

We don't have the extreme inland contrasts you see in places like the US, but Australia is one of the few countries where you can still read millions of years of evolution in nature. I was actually surprised not to see Australia mentioned



in a recent documentary about the world's deserts because almost wherever you fly in this country you can see to the soil, or what I call 'the skin of the animal'. Driving through the countryside often gives me an idea of what may lay beyond and then I'll stop and hire a light aircraft to take me up to between 500 and 5,000 feet. I then just shoot through the window from the co-pilot's seat or over the pilot's shoulder. Looking at maps can also give me a sense of a river system that might be interesting to photograph. I love the drama that Australia can produce, such as the change that takes place when Lake Eyre floods or the way tidal shifts can affect Montgomery Reef.

I hope that by pointing out the beauty of what is there people will be inspired to look after the environment, but I have photographed the outback for mining companies as well as magazines and tourism authorities. Whether I am taking a picture of a natural or manmade pattern,

I leave the interpretation of the scene up to the viewer. I give a lot of talks to schoolchildren through the Art of the Move initiative because I think a sense of wonderment at our environment is the best thing they can have.

I switched from my Pentax 6x7 film camera to a digital Canon 5D Mark II camera some years ago, but I still only take a maximum of six pictures of a particular subject. Nor do I do any significant cropping or photoshop-ing. Years of practise have made me precise. One of my proudest moments was in 1998 when I was named a life member of the Australian Institute of Professional Photographers. Then in 2012, I received the Order of Australia medal for contribution to the arts.

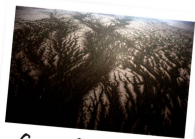
I've worked a lot with Aboriginal communities over the years but never incorporated the secrets I have discovered about sacred lands in Western Australia and the Northern Territory into my books. My work is often compared to Aboriginal art because of its downward vision, but I am not providing a multidimensional map of a place and its myths.

I've done quite a bit of canoeing in the south-west of Western Australia and I love living in the hills about 30 kilometres out of Perth because I confront nature every day. I continue to be amazed how the vegetation around here survives in long periods of drought.

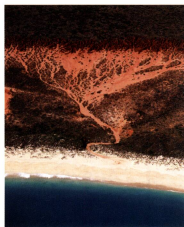
In terms of areas left to photograph, Australia's snowy landscapes have proved difficult to capture. The weather kept us grounded for a week on my last attempt. I don't think I'll ever be finished with photographing the Australian natural landscape from the air though, as it is so varied and the subtle changes and light have always fascinated me. My three daughters are all capable photographers and my wife Lyn is an enormous support.



richardwoldendorp.com



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